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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"DOLLY, DOLLY, WHAT HAS CHANGED YOU SO!" IRA SAID, AS HE KNELT BESIDE HER.

DOLLY'S ADVENTURE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

Cosy bachelor chambers in London, not very far from Piccadilly, one night in early spring, when the London season had barely commenced, and the weather was cold enough to make a fire pleasant.

The said fire burned bright and clear, and two young men seated near its cheerful warmth were lustily puffing away at two choice havannahs.

Both were good-looking. Their united ages would not have made sixty, but Ronald Thorne had to make his own way in the world, while Ira Vernon was the only son of a wealthy baronet, and had but newly succeeded to his honours.

They were sworn friends. They had been schoolfellows, later on, chums at college, and this was their first meeting since Ronald's return

from Malta, where his regiment had been stationed for three years.

"And you're not married?" he remarked, coolly. "Well, Ira, I am surprised. I always thought you'd find a wife long before you came into the title."

"I hope I never may at all if I commit such folly as my father," said the young baronet, angrily. "Do you mean to say, Thorne, you never heard of his imbecility? I should have thought even at Malta the news must have reached you."

"I heard he married again, if that's what you mean. I wasn't particularly surprised. Sir George was not an old man; but for that accident he'd have lived for years."

"He was fifty-four," said his son, sententiously, "and he had been a widower fourteen years. Naturally we had a right to expect he'd continue so."

The young officer laughed; he really could not help it.

He had had almost a son's affection for Sir George Vernon, and he thought his heir a little disrespectful.

"Well, he did not live long to enjoy his

felicity. You have not told me yet whom he married."

"He married a widow."

"And a very suitable thing, too. I thought he had chosen a girl of eighteen, you seemed so indignant."

"I hate widows."

"Well, but perhaps your father didn't."

"He married a widow," went on Sir Ira, fraternally, "whom no one had ever heard of. He actually put in the place of my mother—an earl's daughter, by the way—his own ladylady."

Ronald whistled.

"It was two years ago," went on Sir Ira. "He had gone down to Hastings to spend the winter. I was at the Grange with two of my sisters for Easter, when one fine morning the news came that he was returning home with Lady Vernon."

"And what was she like?"

"You don't imagine we stayed to see. My married sister at once invited Lucy to make her home with her, and I set up these chambers. We wrote a statement of our intentions to the bridegroom, and he was evidently ashamed of his low-born wife, for he agreed with alacrity to our

absence. I must say he behaved very well in money matters, but no money could make up to us for the disgrace he had brought on the name of Vernon."

"I really can't see any disgrace."

His friend stared.

"Would you like a common lodging-house keeper to be put in your mother's place?"

"How do you know she was common?"

"She wouldn't have taken advantage of his folly otherwise. Well, he didn't live long enough to be disenchanted, and he actually was infatuated enough to leave her the Grange for life."

"That's rather a blow to you."

"It's an awful blow. Women of that class often live to be a hundred. Fancy, I'm actually shut out from my own country seat!"

"Have you never seen her? Didn't you go to the funeral?"

"Of course I saw her. I went to the funeral, but I couldn't demean myself to speak to such a woman. To do her justice she never tried to force herself on me. She and her child kept to their own rooms while I was at the Grange."

"She has a child then?"

"Yes, a girl who probably drops her h's and flirts with the butler. I sent my lawyer to Lady Vernon to ask what sum of money would free my home of her presence."

"What reply did she make?"

"That she would not sell the house her husband gave her. She claimed a suite of rooms in the west wing for herself and her child, but said the rest of the house was entirely at my disposal."

"That was reasonable enough."

"I didn't think so. I have all the expense of keeping up the Grange. I can't let the place go to rack and ruin, and my father was so hasty in his wooing he forgot to make any settlement on her. In his will the estate is charged with an allowance of two hundred a-year, but that would not go far towards keeping up such a place as Vernon Grange."

Ronald Thorne looked steadily into the fire. His friend resented his silence.

"I suppose you think I'm to blame. You may have gone down to the Grange and fallen into the arms of your low-born stepmother, and expressed delight at the connection, etc., etc."

"I am not a hypocrite," returned the soldier, hotly; "only I suppose your father loved this lady and lived happily with her!"

"Yes," replied the baronet; "but as he only survived his wedding six months, that's not saying much."

"I don't think I could bring myself to treat my father's wife as you are treating Lady Vernon," said Mr. Thorne, slowly. "It's not like you, Ira. It's the first ungenerous thing I've known you do."

Sir Ira laughed.

"It touched me in my tenderest point—family pride. Then Isobel was so upset."

"But Lady Clare has her husband—"

"Yes, but she loved the Grange. She declared it would spoil Lucy's prospects. Lucy is not married yet."

"And thanks her stepmother for the fact!"

"I fancy so. I don't often go to Clareville. The women are always hard on me because I didn't refuse to pay the allowance. There was a sort of flaw in the way it was made, and I believe I could have refused to pay a half-penny."

"If you had refused you would have been a villain."

"My sisters seem to think I am a monster because I didn't refuse. You see, Ronald, there's no pleasing anyone."

"When are you going to try and please some beautiful young lady, and make your stepmother a dowager?"

Ira shook his head.

"Time enough yet."

The subject was dropped; indeed, the two friends had much else to think of.

Ronald's leave was for six months—after that he would be stationed at Woolwich, and already he had quite determined that life at Woolwich

would be insufferable alone. A pretty little wife was a necessary accompaniment.

"I don't want an heiress," he confessed to Ira. "If she had a little money I shouldn't be too proud to refuse her on that account, but I want a wife who will love me for myself, and not be dull if we have to spend a few evenings in every week *tête à tête*."

Ira shrugged his shoulders.

"A domesticated Hebe; It's a mistake, Ronald. You'll be bored to death!"

"Wait and see."

"Have you no one in view?"

"No one. I was only three-and-twenty when I went to Malta. I think I admired every girl I saw, as matter of course."

"I wonder you didn't lose your heart abroad."

"I didn't. I have come back quite heart-whole and fancy-free."

"Come with me to Lady Ashburton's ball, I promised to look in for an hour."

It was barely ten. Ronald Thorne was easily persuaded, and the two friends started for the mansion inhabited by the Earl and Countess.

Very warm was the welcome one of them received. A baronet of old family, with twenty thousand a-year, is apt to be a favourite in society, in spite of a low-born stepmother.

Ronald was a detriment compared to his friend, and so the greeting bestowed on him was several shades colder.

But the gay young soldier was little troubled. He had less pride than Sir Ira, and cared far less for the world's opinion. His hostess having presented him to a partner he was soon dancing with zest.

The partner was a pretty little matron in the early ages of wifehood. She was very affable and amusing, but Ronald had come late. Her programme was full, and she could not spare him another dance.

"Let me find you a partner!" she said, merrily. "You are looking at all the lasses as if you were strangers to you!"

"I have only just come back to England after a three years' absence, Mrs. Melville."

"Ah, then you feel strange!"

"Utterly bewildered. Who is that girl sitting down and looking at if she were bored?"

Mrs. Melville followed the direction of his eyes.

"That girl," she said, in comical reproof, "is a distant relation of my own."

"Really! I shouldn't have thought it!"

"You are dreadfully rude."

"I mean she wasn't like you. I should say you had taken more than your proper share of sunshine."

"You'd better tell her so."

Ronald took her to a seat and departed, at her desire, to fetch her fan. Meanwhile the pretty little matron addressed herself to the girl whom Ronald had described as looking bored.

"Marguerite, I am going to introduce you to the most remarkable man you ever met."

"I don't want to know him."

"Listen! He wants to dance with you, because he thinks you look bored. I told him you were a distant relation of my own, and he rejoined reproachfully he should say I'd taken more than my share of sunshine, and left you all the shade."

Lady Marguerite Yorke smiled; she really could not help it. She was the greatest heiress of the day. She was almost morbidly afraid of being sought for her money, and this made her short and cold in her intercourse with strangers, and robbed gay scenes like this of all their chances for her.

She was not pretty; she had beautiful grey eyes and masses of soft brown hair, but the expression of her mouth was sad, and her face lacked animation.

"Where could he have lived?" she asked with a bitter little laugh; "not to have heard my market value."

"He has been abroad three years; now don't snub him, dear!"

For Ronald had returned, and the introduction took place.

There was no mistaking the simplicity of the young soldier's manner—no room to doubt his

motives. He evidently looked at his partner as someone who received but little attention in society, and whom it behoved him to snub.

Mrs. Melville had purposely slurred over her cousin's name, and so Ronald had no idea that he held on his arm the Lady Marguerite Yorke, the greatest heiress of the day.

"Are you as fond of dancing as your cousin?"

She shook her head.

"Fanny loves it better than anything else in the world—except her husband."

Ronald smiled.

"Is he here to-night?"

"Oh no, he is in India; she is going out to him next month. I shall miss her dreadfully."

"Then you do not live with her?"

"Oh no! I live with my guardian."

"And this is your first season?"

"How did you know that?"

"I think I guessed it!"

"Yes," and Lady Marguerite sighed, "and I hate it all. I would give anything in the world to go back to the country, and never see this hateful London again, only they won't let me."

Ronald looked kindly into her large gray eyes.

"They are quite right; you ought to see something of the world."

"I have seen too much of it."

"Have you? Yet it is a beautiful world, and England is the pleasantest place in it. I only came home last week from Malta, and though I have not a relation in the world, it made me glad just to be on English ground."

"Not a relation in the world!" and her voice softened, saying pathetically. "Why, this is like me; I have nothing nearer than cousins."

"Friends are better than relations," said Ronald, with a strange eagerness. "I hope, before the season is over, you will admit me to the enjoyment of your friendship."

The dance was over, he resigned her to Mrs. Melville; but all through that evening the memory of those grey eyes haunted him. She was not pretty; many men called her positively plain, and Ronald Thorne had fallen hopelessly in love with her at first sight.

"Really," Sir Ira told him, as they drove home together to the pleasant bachelor chambers where the soldier was such a welcome guest, "You made the running pretty strong for a man who dislikes heiresses, Thorne!"

Ronald started.

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Only that you have been flirting desperately with the greatest heiress in England."

"I only danced with two ladies all night—one was Mrs. Melville, the other her cousin."

"And the cousin is Lady Marguerite Yorke, the possessor of the most beautiful estate in Blanksshire, a town house, and several thousands a-year."

Poor Ronald looked quite disconcerted. "I am not fit to go into society, Ira; I need a lot of polishing up. Why, I took her for Mrs. Melville's poor relation; she seemed awfully dull and neglected."

"She snubs people so. If a man were to speak to her she imagines he wants her property, and arms herself to defend it. Poor girl, she is so awfully plain! She must know she'll be married for her money, but she needn't show she knows it quite so plainly."

"She never snubbed me."

"Didn't she?"

"And I think she has a sweet face—not beautiful, perhaps; but no one would call her plain."

"My dear Ronald, it must be a case of love at first sight! I only hope the heiress will be propitious. But, all the same, Lady Marguerite Yorke is no beauty, and nineteen people out of twenty would tell you she was plain."

Mrs. Melville and her cousin discussed the young officer with great interest over their dressing-room fire; or, to speak more correctly, Fanny talked and her cousin listened.

Lady Marguerite found very little to say on the subject, only when Mrs. Melville suggested they would be sure to meet Mr. Thorne again shortly she positively smiled.

They did meet him again the very next night, but this time he did not seek Lady Marguerite, or pay her any attention; he stood leaning against the wall and looking almost moody.

"What has changed him so?" whispered Mrs. Melville. "He looks quite melancholy."

Lady Marguerite let her beautiful eyes wander in Ronald's direction, and then she blushed deeply. Pretty Mrs. Melville beckoned him with her fan.

"Why didn't you come and talk to us?" she asked him.

He did not answer, but her partner soon came to claim her, and then he stepped into the vacant chair beside Lady Marguerite.

"You are not dancing!"

"I don't think I am very fond of dancing."

"I wanted to tell you," said Ronald, going straight to the point, "of the stupid mistake I made last night. I fear you must have thought me terribly rude!"

There was a bright flush in her cheeks.

"What mistake did you make?"

"I fancied you were, like myself, alone in the world. I thought we had kindred tastes, and that we might be friends. I think I ventured to say as much."

Marguerite felt quite mystified.

"And have you found out since last night that we have not got kindred tastes, and that we can't be friends?"

"I have learned that you are the greatest heiress in England!"

"I am afraid it's true."

"It was a great blow to me."

"Why?" thinking him the strangest man she had ever met.

"I can't explain."

"I should like to know."

"Your face haunted me," he said, simply. "I thought you were the sweetest girl I ever met. You seemed so sad and lonely I ventured to hope I might cheer your path, and now I find that there is a fearful gulf between us, and we must be strangers."

Marguerite Yorke smiled, and her face grew almost radiant.

"Friendship bridges over any gulf," she answered; "but there is none between us, Mr. Thorne." You have thought far more highly of me than I deserve, but one part of your picture is quite true—I am sad and lonely."

Ronald looked at her with a world of tenderness in his dark eyes.

"And you will accept me for your friend and companion until—"

"Until you tire of the post!" with a wistful smile. "Yes, if you wish it."

"Until another claims a higher place in your regard, I should have said, had I been bold enough to finish."

She answered nothing, the band struck up the dance that has been called the Lover's Own, and together Ronald and Lady Marguerite moved forward to the strains of a charming dreamy waltz.

CHAPTER II.

FAR away from London and the gaieties of the season to a quiet country village, where the April air was sweet with the perfume of violets, and the woods were golden with yellow primroses. The glory of the village of Ardleigh was the Grange, which for centuries had been the home of the Vernons; it was a beautiful old manor standing in picturesque grounds; its grey walls, over which the ivy clambered, its velvet lawn and fine old timber all gave it an artistic appearance which charmed the eye.

When Sir George Vernon brought his second wife home a bride no one had called upon her except the clergyman and the doctor (both unmarried men); the neighbours one and all followed the example of the heir and his sisters, and kept rigidly aloof.

No one knew whether this troubled the Baronet. He loved his second wife passionately, and the few months of their union sped happily by. His death was the result of an accident; he only lingered a few hours; there was no

time for his children to come to him or for him to plead with them on his death-bed to be kind to his widow.

She felt it cruelly—the slight heaped on her by the young Sir Ira, the insulting proposal that she should accept a sum of money and rid the Grange of her presence. She refused, because Sir George's last wish had been that she should spend her life in the home where he had made her so happy, and because she longed still that a time might come in which she would be reconciled to her husband's family.

One of those first bright April days Lady Vernon sat in a low chair by the fire, her dress a rich black silk, a widow's cap upon her still luxuriant hair. Barely thirty-six years had passed over her brow, and she looked far younger even than her age through the delicacy of her complexion and the brilliancy of her eyes.

At her feet sat, or rather crouched, a young girl, barely seventeen, and who at first sight looked more like her sister than her daughter. Dorothea Hardy—called Dora by her mother and Miss Dolly by the whole household—had inherited the full her mother's beauty.

She was a slim, graceful girl, with large, dark blue eyes, a complexion of the purest, creamiest white, small red arched lips, a broad open forehead, framed by masses of hair of the true golden brown that has grown rarer every year; her features were regular, and had a nameless stamp of aristocracy that her mother's lacked.

She heeded her beauty little. To Dolly she whole world meant her mother, and Lady Vernon had just broken to her the news that very, very soon she would be left alone.

"It can't be true," moaned the girl, in anguish. "Oh, mother, say it is all a mistake! How can you go away, and leave your Dolly, who has no one in the world but you?"

She little knew it was the thought of leaving her, and leaving her penniless, that was such torture to Lady Vernon as almost to have hurried on the end. She was dying of consumption. The end was very near; in a brief time there would be no one, in all the world, to guard the beautiful child from harm and sorrow.

"My darling!" she said, faintly, "it is quite true. I put off telling you as long as I possibly could; I would not shadow your bright face too soon. Dolly, I have sent for Sir Ira."

Dolly rose, and stamped her pretty foot in anger. She was no heroine, nothing in the world but a tender-hearted girl, who loathed even the very name of the man who had treated her mother with such scorn.

"How could you?" she said. "He'll be glad—he'll come here exulting over our trouble!"

"I do not think he will do that. I think he is just man, though he has seemed so stern to us. I have always felt if I could see him, Dolly, he would understand things better."

"It will be too late," sobbed Dolly. "Even if he's sorry he can't make up to you for his cruelty now."

"He can more than make up, Dolly: he can soothe my last earthly trouble by promising to befriend my child."

Dorothea's blue eyes flashed.

"Oh, do not ask him to do that, mother; I had rather beg my bread from door to door than live on Sir Ira's charity."

The mother looked at her and sighed. It had cost her something to crave a favour at her stepson's hands; but how could she leave her child alone, dowered as she was with this fatal beauty, and unconscious of all harm?

"What would you do, dear?" she asked, sadly. "You are so little, and so young."

"I could teach, or there is Daisy, mamma. We haven't heard from her for years; but I am sure she would be true to us. Daisy always loved me, mamma."

"Daisy is a great lady now," sighed poor Lady Vernon. "Besides, she may be married, and so have it out of her power to help old friends. No, Dolly, my darling, I have thought of everything, and there is nothing but to appeal to Sir Ira."

Dorothea pouted.

"Mother, darling, I can't bear to vex you;

but I don't like it. I think I shall hate Sir Ira and his wife."

"I don't think he has got a wife, Dora."

"Well, his sisters then. There's a picture of Lady Clare in the gallery, and she looks horrid."

Lady Vernon put out one of her thin hands, and smoothed Dorothea's hair caressingly.

"You have been very happy here, dear."

"Very, mother," emphatically. "Sir George was as good to me as he possibly could be, and since he died I have had you all to myself. Oh, yes; I have been very happy."

"Then don't you think, out of gratitude to your stepfather, you owe it to him to be more charitable in your feelings towards his son."

"Has he been charitable towards us, mother?"

"In word, no—in deed, yes, Dolly. I believe it was in his power to stop the whole of our little income."

Dorothea pouted again.

"Well, I'm sure he's an old horro."

"He's only nine-and-twenty, Dolly!"

"Twelve years older than I am, and I feel venerable sometimes. Why, mother, your stepson's only seven years younger than you!"

Lady Vernon smiled faintly.

"His father loved him well; of the three, Ira was far the dearest to Sir George."

"And you think he will come?"

A strange, wistful smile crossed the mother's lips.

"I hope so, Dolly."

"You won't want me to see him, mother?"

"Not if you would rather not."

At that very moment Sir Ira Vernon sat alone in his smoking-room contemplating a letter which bore the Ardleigh postmark.

"There's no one in the place likely to write to me. It can't be from that woman—I doubt if she can sign her own name, and this is a lady's hand."

He tore open the envelope, unfolded the letter, and read the few lines it contained:

"Vernon Grange,
April 2nd, 1889.

"DEAR SIR IRA.—The doctors tell me I am dying. We have not been friends, you and I, but I do not think you will carry your animosity so far as to refuse to come to me. In a few weeks—it may be a few days—your home will be free for ever from my presence; but first I beg of you to let me see you, and I do not think, for your father's sake, you will refuse her who was his much-loved wife."

"BEATRICE VERNON."

Sir Ira held the letter in his hand and read it again and again. He was very undecided as to his line of conduct. Was it a ruse to beguile him into intercourse, or was it what it professed to be—the dying request of a woman he had wronged in thought and word.

"I daresay it's only a trumped-up pretext to get to know me; perhaps she thinks I'm a great temptation as my dead old father, and that she can catch me for her daughter as easily as she caught him for herself. I daresay that's it; but still I think I'll go—I'm proof against such machinations, thank Heaven, and, somehow, if my father's widow is dying I shouldn't care to leave her last wish ungratified."

Ronald Thorne was still his guest. The young officer was hopelessly in love with Lady Marguerite Yorke, and it seemed clear to every one but himself that she returned his affection. The pretty romance had come to a deadlock since Ronald wouldn't propose, from scruples of his darling's wealth, and Lady Marguerite, not being one of the ladies who wish to establish women's rights, declined to usurp his prerogative and make the proposal herself.

"Ronald," said Sir Ira, a little gravely, "shall you mind being here by yourself for a day or two? I find I must go out of town on business."

"Shall I come with you, Ira? You seem bothered about something."

"I am bothered. I have received an urgent

summons to Vernon Grange. I don't half like going, and yet I can't reconcile it to my conscience to stay away."

"Shall I go instead of you?"

"I don't fancy Lady Marguerite would put up with my 'friendship' instead of yours, thank you, old fellow."

Ronald groaned.

"It's not much use my seeing her; it only makes me wretched."

"Because you're an idiot."

"Thank you."

"Well, it's the truth. Anyone can see you have only to propose to be accepted."

"I'm not a fortune-hunter."

"Hang it, man, you can't expect her to propose to you, can you?"

"I don't expect anything."

"Cheerful! When do you go to Woolwich?"

"Next week."

"Does she know it?"

"Yes," and Ronald sighed. "She told me she had read it was a thriving town with a growing trade. I suppose she had looked it up in the *Gazetteer*."

"Which shows her interest."

"She said she dared say I should be very happy there, as if I could be happy anywhere without her!"

Ira laid his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"We've been friends, boy and man, for well-nigh twenty years. Ronald, don't let your happiness slip by you just for a scruple."

"But—"

"If she loves you," returned Ira, "do you think you've any right to let your cursed pride blight her life?"

"Then if you were me you'd—"

"If I loved any woman I should tell her so, were she as high above me as a princess; but I never shall love anyone, gentle or simple, Ronald. Now, when I come back from the Grange I shall expect an invitation to the wedding."

He telegraphed to announce his coming, and so when he alighted at the Ardingly station, a fly was waiting. Since her husband's death the widow kept no carriage; the full complement of servants were at the Grange, but these were in Sir Ira's pay. The maid who had been engaged on her marriage was my lady's only retainer.

The Baronet entered the fly and gave the order, "to the Grange;" then, as he leant back in the carriage, he tried hard to prepare himself for the interview which lay before him.

He had always fancied the *ci-devant* landlady as a red-faced, buxom woman; he had no idea of her daughter's age, but pictured her a younger likeness of her mamma, midway between twenty and thirty. He felt pretty sure that Lady Vernon had sent for him to implore his charity for this young woman.

Had she only said as much in her letter he would have felt more kindly disposed towards her, and he could then have sent a written promise to continue to her the income enjoyed by her mother, and he would have been spared the annoyance of this visit.

The old housekeeper, who had been his nurse, was waiting in the hall.

"It is a good sight to see you here at last, Sir Ira! You are kindly welcome, sir. How are the young ladies?"

The stately Baronet answered her with ready courtesy. Sir Ira always won golden opinions from his inferiors. Then there came an awkward pause.

Upon his former visit, when he came to his father's funeral, the young master had laid down one law—the names of Lady Vernon and her daughter were not to be mentioned in his presence. Things might be different now, but still Mrs. Hill did not feel sure.

Her master himself broached the subject.

"I have come to see Lady Vernon, Hill. Will you ask if she is ready to receive me?"

"My lady is quite ready, Sir Ira, and has ordered refreshment in the small dining-room, in case you had not lunched."

It was four o'clock. Sir Ira had lunched two hours before; he accepted a glass of wine more

to detain Hill in conversation than from any desire for the stimulant.

"I suppose Lady Vernon is very ill!"

He knew that Hill was devoted to himself, that for his sake and his sisters' she had bitterly resented their father's second marriage. He therefore expected her to speak coldly and disparagingly at least of his father's widow. He never forgot his surprise. Hill's eyes seemed suddenly to brim over with tears, and the old woman had to use her handkerchief freely before she could answer him.

"She's dying, Sir Ira," said the servant, gravely, "that's what it is. I've seen it myself for months, but she was always so bright and cheerful, I always fancied she didn't know it. She never got over the master's death, you see, Sir Ira."

Pleasant news for him, who believed she had married his father for love of gain!

"I suppose her own family are here, Hill?"

"There's no one here but Miss Dolly, Sir Ira."

"Ah! What is Lady Vernon's illness?"

"The doctors call it consumption, sir, but it seems to me just a fading away."

This did not quite agree with Sir Ira's ideas of a buxom widow, but he was still quite unprepared for the style of matron he was to meet.

Hill conducted him with great ceremony upstairs to a door before which velvet curtains were closely drawn, and pushing these aside, she motioned him to enter.

Half reluctantly he obeyed her. At first he fancied the room was untenanted, then he noticed a sofa drawn up to the fire, and approaching this he saw a slight, shadowy figure advancing to meet him.

Sir Ira felt as in a dream. Despite the cruel ravages of disease this stranger was still far more beautiful than women of whose loveliness he had heard praise. She was so slight and slender that her figure had almost a girlish grace, but the face had a mother's tenderness, and there were lines of patient sorrow about the mouth. At first sight he imagined her to be twenty-five, then, as he observed her more closely, he thought she might be thirty.

"It was very kind of you to come," and his stepmother put out her hand.

Sir Ira led her back to the sofa, placed her gently on it, and covered her with the fur rug before he answered,—

"I am grieved to see you like this! Believe me, until your letter came I had no idea you were not in good health."

She smiled, and then Sir Ira quite understood his father's infatuation.

"I have known it myself a long time, only I would not trouble you until I was quite sure."

"Are you quite sure now?" inquired the Baronet, hastily. "Might not fresh advice and change of air do something? I need not tell you that—"

She understood the offer he hesitated to make, and interrupted him.

"They could do nothing; it is like your father's son to think of it, but I want nothing for myself at your hands. Before many days I shall be with my husband, and you will be free to bring your wife to Vernon Grange."

"I have no wife."

"I know," she said, faintly: "and I am very sorry. If you had been married you might have looked more favourably on my request; now I fear you will think it both troublesome and irksome."

"I assure you I will do my utmost to grant it."

"You may have heard that I was a widow when your father met me."

He bowed.

"I am going to ask your kindness for my child," her voice almost broke. "We have not been friends, you and I. I know that my darling has not the slightest claim upon your generosity, but she is so young, and very soon she will be left alone. It is a mother pleading for her only child who appeals to you—a mother who was your father's much-loved wife."

Sir Ira never hesitated. He took the thin, white hands and clasped them reverently in his.

"Madame, I have done you a cruel injustice. I have wronged you harshly in my thoughts, but I will right that wrong in my care for your child. I promise you that your daughter's future shall be my charge; that she shall be provided for and guarded from all sorrow as carefully as though she were a little sister left to my care by my dear father."

An almost unearthly brightness came to Lady Vernon's face.

"I do not ask for that," she said, faintly. "You are a young man. It would be hard to put such a charge upon you. All I want is to know that you will not let my darling suffer from poverty, and that you will not make the bread of dependence too bitter to her."

Sir Ira started.

"You could think that of me; I have not shown you the best side of my character; but surely you cannot think me so base as that!"

Lady Vernon hesitated.

"I have spoilt her," she said, simply. "She was here when I was a two months' widow. She was all I had in the world, and I could not bear to cross her wishes. She is proud and wayward sometimes, but her heart is true and loving. Young as she is, she is staunch and loyal."

It never came into Sir Ira's thoughts that this was the description of a beautiful girl, not of a little child. Looking at the frail, lovely mother, he imagined her daughter to be a child—ten years old at the very most.

"I will teach her to love me," he answered firmly. "Have no fear, Lady Vernon, your daughter shall have a happy home here. It is true I have no hope to fill, in ever such a small degree, your place to her, but all that brother could do for sister I will do for her!"

A long, long silence.

"You have robbed death of its sting," said Lady Vernon softly. "I will tell Dolly of your kindness. I hope, oh, I hope, you will not find her very wayward."

Sir Ira pictured a little passionate child, wilful, but loving, generous, though wayward. He fancied he could get on very well with such a creature to pet and care for.

"It is a pretty name," he said, slowly.

"Her real name is Dorothea. I have had to call her Dora lately, but Dolly comes more readily."

"Shall I see her?"

Lady Vernon hesitated.

"I think not," she said at last. "She only learned the truth about me yesterday, and it has upset her sadly, poor child. I thank you from my heart for proposing it, but I think your meeting had better wait until—"

He understood her meaning—"until I am no more" and rose to go.

"I am very glad I came," he said, as he held her hand in his. "Now though it has been to find you thus, my visit has contradicted many of my mistaken fancies."

"I, too, am glad you have been," she answered. "You have smoothed my path to the grave and eased my heart of a heavy load. I shall rest well to-night, Sir Ira, now I know that Dolly will have a brother."

The Baronet felt a strange mistiness about his eyes. He bent over the dying woman and pressed his lips to her forehead. Another minute and he was walking down the broad oaken staircase towards the door, where the fly waited to take him back to the station.

On his lonely journey to London more than once he beguiled his leisure by trying to fancy a child with a face like Lady Vernon's, and wondering how it would feel to have a beautiful little girl depending on him for love and sympathy, and calling him "brother" in sweet, childish treble.

CHAPTER III.

SIR IRA had a strangely sober face when he reached his cosy, bachelor chambers. He had been engaged to a dinner party that night, but he never thought of going fresh from that death-

bed scene, as it seemed to him. He was in no humour for gaiety.

He was sitting over the fire, smoking, wondering a little whether he should have to live at Vernon Grange, or if it would be possible for Dolly to form part of that cosy, bachelor establishment in London, when the door opened briskly, and Ronald Thorne entered.

The young officer put one hand upon Sir Ira's shoulder. There was a glad, bright light in his eyes as he cried,—

"I took your advice, old fellow, and it was the best thing going."

"Then Lady Marguerite has consented?"

"Yes!" Mr. Thorne looked quite hot. "I told her I didn't care a pin about the money. We'd give it all to a charity if she liked, but she said she thought she'd rather we kept it."

"Sensible woman!"

"She isn't a woman!" indignantly. "She is barely twenty!"

Ira looked at him half-sadly.

"You've taken the disease, Ronald, evidently. I wonder what it feels like to be thoroughly in love as you are!"

"Haven't you ever tried?"

The Baronet shook his head.

"I've flirted with plenty of women. I've even seriously liked a few, but I never yet saw a girl with whom I should care to pass my life. I never looked into a woman's face and coveted it for the ornament of my home!"

Ronald stared.

"It's very odd."

"I suppose so."

"You're one of the richest men about town. Surely it's your duty to find a wife."

"I'm going to have a daughter instead."

"What on earth do you mean?"

Ira grew grave.

"I went to the Grange to-day. Ronald, I never had such a shock."

"Was your stepmother worse than you expected? I can hardly believe that, for you certainly had no rose-coloured ideal of her."

"She was an angel!" said Sir Ira, slowly. "One of the loveliest women I ever saw; a lady in thought and word. Just think how I have treated her, Ronald!"

"Well, you can change now."

"Not to her! She is dying."

"Why did she send for you?"

"To ask my protection for her little girl, soon to be motherless."

"And you replied—"

"I promised to care for the child as though I were her brother. I don't dislike the idea. I always had a fancy for children."

"How old is she?"

"I've no idea. The mother looked almost a girl herself. Poor little thing! I mean to be very good to her."

Ronald looked perplexed.

"You'll have to send her to school!"

"I shall not! I shall keep her with me, and buy her sixpennyworth of sweets every day!"

"But you can't unless you encumber yourself with a governess! A bachelor can't bring up a girl! Besides, she's no relation to you! Any one would think you meant to marry her! No, Ira, you'll have to send your protégée to school, or get Lady Clare to take pity on her!"

"Isobel hates children!"

"That's unwomanly!"

"I know, but it's a fact. Besides, she resented my father's marriage too bitterly to be good to this poor little orphan. Well, we won't discuss my adopted daughter. Tell me your own plans, Ronald. I suppose you've made some!"

"We are going to be married in July, because Marguerite thinks Woolwich would be nice in summer."

"But you can't live at Woolwich!"

"We can!"

"But you'll be richer than your General. I made sure you'd sell out!"

"I shall not do anything of the sort! I told Marguerite that, and she quite agrees with me. She says she hates men with nothing to do."

"Well, you'll be considered most eccentric!"

"I expect we can stand that!"

So Ira went to bed soon after this, and his last waking thoughts were of Lady Vernon and her daughter.

He was certainly not best pleased the next morning to receive a letter from his sister, Lady Clare, full of cruel speeches about their stepmother. He quite forgot that two days ago he would fully have shared Isobel's sentiments.

"I hear," wrote that august matron, "that 'that woman' is really ill, so that there is a fair hope that ere long you may be master of your own house. I write to caution you, dear Ira (knowing your Quixotically generous disposition), against weakly yielding to any appeals made to you by the usurper. She was penniless when our father married her, and she is sure to want to saddle our family with the support of her low-born child. I imagine she knows my sentiments too well to write to me, but I quite expect you will receive a letter of artful entreaty."

"Once for all, let me caution you to be firm; my father's stepsister has no claim whatever on you. Let her keep herself, or be placed in some charitable asylum, but don't give her any encouragement to claim kindred with us."

The rest of the letter was on other topics, but Ira was fairly exasperated. He lighted a candle and burnt the offending pages before he joined Ronald at breakfast, and even then his brow was so cloudy that the young officer roused himself from his dreams of Marguerite to inquire if anything was amiss.

"Nothing," said the Baronet, sharply; "only my sister has written me a letter which makes me doubt whether her heart is composed of the usual ingredients or the nether millstone."

"I thought you and Lady Clare agreed so well!"

"We do. I don't suppose any brother and sisters were ever more united than we three; only it occurs to me sometimes that Lucy and Isobel were born without feelings."

"Sir Thomas would not say so!"

"Sir Thomas is an idiot! He's just double his wife's age, and he worships her. I don't suppose he's the slightest idea Isobel took him because he chanced to be the richest man who proposed to her."

"Aren't you rather hard on her?"

"I don't think so!"

He sat down, later on, and wrote to his sister. Some nameless reserve made him ignore one chief point in her letter. He told her he had seen Lady Vernon, and there was no doubt her days were numbered; but of her petition to him, and his answer to it, he said nothing.

He enjoyed very little of Ronald's company in the days that followed; the young officer spent every possible moment with his *sainte*; and when she was invisible he devoted his time to house-hunting at Woolwich.

Lady Marguerite Yorke's guardian had completely acquiesced in the fate she had chosen for herself. He had wanted her to marry a title, but he had come to have such strong doubts of her ever marrying anyone that he was quite willing to give her to this well-born young officer without further difficulty.

So that for once the course of true love ran smoothly. Ronald and Marguerite had met with little to trouble them in their courtship. They both loved each other devotedly; neither had any very near relations to criticize their desire, and so their lot bid fair to be a very bright one.

The wedding was to be the very first week in July. An exacting country would probably afford Ronald a fortnight's leave of absence, which the young couple would spend at the bride's country seat; then they would return to Woolwich, and Mr. Thorne would again take up his military duties.

"I'm afraid you'll be dull while I'm away," he said fondly to Marguerite; "you'll have to get all your friends to come and see you."

"They wouldn't make up to me for losing you," she whispered; "but, Ronald, I have two friends I want you very much to know. They were very very good to me when I was a child; indeed, one of them saved my life. So you won't mind if they are poor, and a wee bit shabby."

"I'll welcome them if they come in rags, pet; but who are they?"

"My old governess and her daughter! You can't think how good Mrs. Hardy was to me, or how she put up with all my whims. We weren't so very rich ourselves then. I was plain Miss Yorke, not Lady Marguerite. My mother was dead, and my father was glad to place me with a lady who would keep me from year's end to year's end, and never expect me to go away for the holidays."

"Poor little Marguerite!"

"Oh, no, I was not! They were so good to me. Mrs. Hardy was just like a mother, and I loved her little girl as though she had been my sister. I was with them ten years."

"Ten years!"

"It almost broke my heart when papa took me away and made me live with a prim old cousin of his—you see I was Lady Marguerite then—and so he supposed dear Mrs. Hardy was not good enough, though he had been glad enough to leave me there before. I suppose I had a horrid temper, Ronald! I sulked and stormed by turns, to make my new guardian let me go back to my dear old governess."

"And wouldn't she?"

"No; and, worse than that, she ascribed all my faults to Mrs. Hardy's influence, and she got papa's leave to break off the correspondence. For two years I was so closely watched I had no chance of writing. When I could take the law into my own hands my letter came back to me endorsed,—

"Gone away, left no address."

Her voice almost broke. Ronald understood that she had loved these friends of her childhood very dearly, and that there had been little sympathy or affection between her and the noble Earl who, two years ago, had died, leaving her an orphan.

"We'll find them, never fear," said Ronald, confidently. "When we are married, my darling, we'll look for them together, and they shall come and stay with us as long as you like."

She rewarded him with a bright smile.

"That is just like you, Ronald—who is your favourite friend?"

"Ira Vernon!"

"Well, he's dreadfully stately and solemn, but I'll try and like him, for your sake."

Ronald professed a proper amount of gratitude, and would have passed on the promise to the person it more immediately concerned, but that when he returned home he found Sir Ira had started for Lancashire.

CHAPTER IV.

It was only a week since his former visit, and Ronald knew for a fact that no summons had come. He expressed his surprise to the valet, an old acquaintance of his.

"My master went off quite suddenly, sir," explained that functionary; "he seemed to see something in the *Times* which struck him all on a heap. He just rang the bell, and ordered his cab, and was out of the house in a twinkling."

"And you think he has gone to Lancashire?"

"I am quite sure of it, sir; he called out to me as he got into the cab to pack a portmanteau and send it after him, as he shouldn't be home for a few days."

"I suppose Lady Vernon is worse. Was there no letter?"

"Not at all, sir. There's the paper on the table now just as he left it; perhaps you'd like to run your eye over it, sir."

Ronald Thorne did like. He soon found the clue to his friend's disappearance. In the first column of the *Times* the name of Beatrice Vernon figured among the deaths; and, to Ronald's surprise, the date was the very day after Ira's former visit to the Grange.

"Why on earth did no one write and tell him?" was the young officer's exclamation.

"Why, that poor child must have been alone almost a week!"

Sir Ira Vernon had read the announcement with mingled indignation and horror. All the servants at the Grange knew his address.

The doctor who attended Lady Vernon and the clergyman could have written to him. It seemed a slight to his promise that "little Dolly" should have been left without a word or line from her new protector, and so the Bateman arrived at the Grange very much disposed to scold some one.

One thing puzzled him—the blinds were not touched. There was no sign of mourning from the outside of the house; though, when Hill opened the door to him, she wore black ribbons in her cap.

"What is the meaning of this?" began her master. "Why was I not sent for? How is it that I learn Lady Vernon's death first through the paper?"

Poor Hill looked troubled at these reproaches.

"We did send for you. Please, sir, Mr. Hylton wrote himself the very day of my lady's death."

"I have never had it."

"I am quite sure he wrote, sir. He told me he had sent it to Lady Clare's, as he thought it might reach you sooner than if he directed it to the club."

Ira quite understood now why he had not received it. Isobel had seen the postmark, guessed it was the appeal she so much contended, and so retained it. He blushed for his sister even then.

"You are tired with travelling, sir!" said Hill, in her respectful, bony manner. "Shall I get dinner for you, Sir Ira, or could you take some cold meat and wine at once?"

"I don't think I can eat anything."

He had gone almost mechanically to the dining-room. Hill followed anxiously.

"I suppose it was sudden at last?"

"It was the morning after you left, sir. Miss Dolly took up my lady's breakfast as usual. She never let anyone wait upon her mamma but herself. But she came down and told me she couldn't wake her. I guessed then what had happened."

"Poor child!"

"Ay, you may well say that, Sir Ira. Never were mother and child more attached than my lady and her daughter. It almost breaks one's heart to look at Miss Dolly now, sir. She seems like a white flower that's crushed by the wind."

"Have arrangements been made about the funeral? Where is it to be?"

"It was this afternoon, Sir Ira. When you never came or wrote, Mr. Hylton took the management of things. My lady died on Sunday, and he thought to-day was delay enough."

It was Saturday; there had been no seeming haste. Ira knew his own conduct must have seemed cruel in the eyes of the simple country people; but he knew, too, that the fault was none of his—it lay at the door of his sister, Lady Clare.

"Did the child go?" he asked, mechanically; "Miss Dolly!"

"Ay, and I wish she hadn't, sir. She fainted clean away before the grave. The doctor picked her up; he would fain have taken her to his own house—everyone loves Miss Dolly—but she begged and prayed him not, and he brought her here, and she's in her own little white bedroom, where she's cried herself to sleep."

"Poor child!"

Hill hesitated.

"She's not a Vernon, Sir Ira—but she's a winsome creature, the very model of her mamma. There's none of us servants but'll be sorry when she goes away."

"You can spare your sorrow, Hill. Miss Dolly will stay here!"

Hill stared at him.

"It is quite settled. Lady Vernon appointed me guardian to her daughter, and her home will be here with me."

"But you've no wife—begging pardon, Sir Ira, for my freedom—and Miss Dolly's a tender creature that's not fit to live without a lady's care."

"I suppose a governess must be got or something of the kind," said Sir Ira, shortly.

"Anyhow, Hill, you can be sure of one thing. Lady Vernon's daughter will fill exactly the same position here Miss Lucy used to occupy."

Miss Lucy had been a far greater favourite with the household than the stately Isobel. Mrs. Hill's sad face began to brighten, and she drew from her pocket a letter, which she placed in her master's hands.

"It was found in my lady's room, sir. We think she must have written it after seeing you."

It was addressed to himself, but the characters were in pencil, and very faint and tremulous. Mrs. Hill went out and left him alone with his missive from the dead.

Only a few lines of heartfelt gratitude, concluding with a prayer that he "would be gentle with Dolly." "I have tried," went on the letter, "to make her see how generous you are, and how fair a lot you offer her; but she is so sad and sorrowful now, I fear she hardly understands. Just now she can think of nothing but losing me; but if you will bear with her until the first brunt of her grief is over, I know in time my child will not be ungrateful."

Sir Ira came down the next morning prepared for an introduction to his ward, but Hill informed him Miss Dolly was not up. He came home from church to an early dinner only to hear that Miss Dolly would not dine. He rang the bell for the housekeeper.

"This will never do!" he began; "the child will starve herself to death. What has she had to eat to-day?"

Hill could only answer that her charge refused all food. She lay on the sofa, with her face turned to the wall, and hardly roused herself to speak.

"Does she know I am here?"

"Yes."

"And that I am anxious to see her?"

"I tried to persuade her to come down, sir, but it was no use. She said you would only think her a trouble and a burden. She wished she was in the grave with her own mamma, and then she began to cry, poor lamb, as if her heart would break."

Sir Ira pushed away his plate. He was only at the second course, but he could not have taken another mouthful.

"Where shall I find her, Hill?"

"She is in her mamma's room; where you saw my lady. You will be patient with her, Sir Ira? Her heart is sore with grief, poor young thing, and she hardly knows what she says."

Sir Ira walked upstairs to the door with the velvet curtains. He pushed these aside, and entered noiselessly. Everything reminded him painfully of his former visit. Now, as then, at first sight he imagined the room empty; then he saw a sight which made his very heart ache. Something very small and slight knelt in a heap by the sofa. He could not distinguish its size or form; he only saw a mass of black drapery, and a golden head buried in a cushion, while bitter, voiceless sobs were uttered which seemed to convulse the little figure.

"Dolly!"

He had closed the door and stood watching her with a strange pain at his heart.

"Dolly!" he repeated, "won't you speak to me? My poor child, don't you know you belong to me now? Your poor mother left you in my care!"

A slight movement among the heap, and a tiny figure stood before him. She was taller far than he expected. She had all her mother's beauty, and a charm of her own besides. Sir Ira could see that, even though her eyes were swollen with weeping.

"I wish you'd go away!"

They were her very first words, and Sir Ira did not attempt to obey them; instead he approached closer to her, and took one of her hands.

"You will make yourself really ill if you go on like this. Sit down, I want to talk to you."

He spoke with an air of authority. Before she could resist he had lifted her on to the sofa. Then he sat down by her side and chafed her冰冷的手 in his.

"Why didn't you come?" she asked him,

bitterly. "She believed in you and thought you were kind, and yet you never, never came to her funeral!"

"I never had the letter, Dolly."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes; I saw the—the death in the *Times* and I set off at once. I would not leave you alone an hour longer than I could help."

Dorothea raised her large blue eyes to his face, and looked at it searching. There was the innocence of a child and the intelligence of a woman in the scrutiny.

"I believe you. I am glad you have come! I want to talk to you."

This declaration of independence surprised Sir Ira. His ward puzzled him altogether. She was quite as beautiful as he had pictured her; but he had imagined her ten or less; he saw now she must be twelve or even fifteen.

"I am quite ready to talk to you on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That you come downstairs and make tea for me afterwards. I am sure it is not good for you sitting up here."

Dolly's eyes filled with tears.

"She used to be here."

"But she is not here now!"

"No. But after to-morrow I may never see it again, and I want to be here as much as I can till I go away."

"You are not going away?"

"Yes, I am."

"My dear child," said Sir Ira, tenderly, "don't you know that your mother left you to me?"

"Mamma told me she had asked you to see me. I begged her not to; it was the only thing she had ever refused me in her life."

"Why have you such an objection to me?"

"I think you have treated us abominably."

"I treated your mother abominably I admit, though I don't think a child like you can understand the facts of the case."

"I wish you wouldn't keep calling me a child."

"But you are one."

"I am not! Mother used to call me her child, and her little girl, but that was only because she loved me."

"And I shall love you too!" said Sir Ira, gently. "I feel very lonely sometimes, Dolly. You shall be my little sister, and I will make a great pet of you. You shall have a governess to be with you while I am away, and between us we will bring you up to be a very fascinating young lady."

Dorothea shook her head.

"I don't want a governess; I finished lessons long ago."

"Indeed! how old are you?"

He was sitting close beside her, still holding her hand. He was curious for her reply, but quite expected her to say "twelve."

"I shall be eighteen next birthday."

Poor Sir Ira! He dropped her little hand and almost retreated from her side in his dismay. Seventeen already! Of an age to be presumed to require a chaperone—to steal men's hearts. What on earth was he to do with her? He knew her mother had never meant to deceive him, that the mistake from first to last had been his own, but that did not lessen his difficulties. How was he "to take care of" a young lady of seventeen, who was not in the least degree related to him?"

"Are you surprised!" said Dolly, a little awed by his gravity. "Mother used to tell me sometimes no one would take me for anything but a schoolgirl. Yet, indeed, I feel quite old."

"You look a child—a perfect child!"

She put her hand to her hair, which floated round her like a golden veil.

"I look much older when I have my coils, but I was so tired to-day, and I never meant to see anyone. Hill thought it wouldn't matter."

Sir Ira wished Hill had not been so remiss, not that he believed any coils would make Dolly look sullen but child.

"You are thinking what you can do with

me," said the girl, her petulant tone changing to one of wistful sadness. "I loved mamma. I should be an awful trouble to you."

"You are nothing of the sort!"

"But you need not mind," continued Dolly, "for I never mean to bother you. I should have been gone before this, only I could not bear not to see the last of her. But to-morrow I shall leave the Grange."

"You will do no such thing."

"I shall!"

"What do you mean to do?"

"I mean to earn my own living."

"Ishan't let you."

"You must! Do you think I could bear to live a burden on your charity? Why, it would kill me!"

"It won't be charity, Dolly, do be reasonable!"

"I am! All these months you have hated us because we lived here. You were glad of mother's death because it gave you the Grange. Do you think I could forget that?"

"You are a foolish child!"

"Even children have their feelings!"

"And their plans, it seems. Pray what do you mean to do when you leave here? Have you any relations whose protection you prefer to mine?"

"I have no relations in the world. My father was a clergyman, and he died young. I always think he must have been well off, because I used to mind being poor so much."

"Then you have been poor!"

"Awfully poor once. I shall go to London, Sir Ira, and earn my own living. I have heard that anyone can get work in London, and I mean to try."

Sir Ira looked at her aghast. With her strange fascinating beauty, her utter innocence of the world and its wickedness, he shuddered at the bare idea of her venturing alone to the great metropolis.

"We will talk of that later," he said, gravely. "Now I claim your promise; come downstairs, and let us have our tea."

It was served in the small drawing-room. Dolly poured it out, using both hands to lift the heavy silver teapot. Sir Ira watched her with a load at his heart. What on earth was he to do with her!

"Should you like to go abroad, Dolly?"

"No!"

"I was thinking a year at a good school might be an advantage to you."

"I'd rather earn my own living. I don't want ever to bother you again, Sir Ira. I shall go away to-morrow, and then you can forget all about me, and try not even to remember your father's second wife and her low-born child."

"Do you think it is generous to taunt me, Dolly?" he asked her, reproachfully.

"Do you think it's generous to try and make me a pauper on your bounty?"

She was very wilful. Sir Ira thought he had never heard a finer description than that given by Lady Vernon of her little daughter.

"You loved your mother, I suppose?"

"Loved her!" and Dorothea's eyes flashed. "Sir Ira, do you dare to doubt it? I worshipped her."

"And yet you seem to take a strange delight in crossing her wishes."

"I never crossed them in my life."

"What are you doing now?"

"I—I—"

"Your mother's one anxiety was your future. If for that she could overcome her natural repugnance to send for me, if with her last breath she confided you to my care, are you showing your affection by refusing every effort of mine for your happiness and welfare?"

She was sobered in a moment.

"I daresay you mean to be kind; but, oh! the misery of being a pensioner on your charity."

"And you think I should consider you that?"

"Your sisters would."

"My sisters are not you!"

She hesitated.

"I know I'm little," she said, slowly, "but I feel things just the same."

"What do you feel?"

"I'm only seventeen now. I might live twenty years, you know."

"You might live seventy, if it came to that. I hope you will."

"I don't!" and she shuddered. "Well, you can't want me to go on living on your charity for twenty years."

"My dear child, you don't understand life," said Ira, slowly. "The probability is you wouldn't live on my charity, as you call it, six months."

She looked interested.

"You think I shall die, then. I am so glad. You can't think how dreary and miserable I am without mamma."

Sir Ira felt fairly exasperated with her. Why couldn't she see his meaning as any other girl would have done?

"I do not allude to your death!" he said, very softly.

"Well, you said I should only live six months."

"I meant that in all probability you would marry!"

She shook her head.

"I shall never marry anyone."

"You don't know."

"I am quite sure."

"How?"

"To marry people have to be in love," went on Dolly, in perfect ignorance, the facts were not as she stated them; "and I never mean to love anyone again."

Sir Ira looked troubled.

"Have you no wish about your own future? You talk of earning your own living. How did you mean to set about it?"

"I mean to be a governess. If people wouldn't have me to teach their children, I should have gone into a shop."

"A shop!"

"It is quite honest. I think I should have chosen a florist. I should have been so happy among the flowers."

Sir Ira knew quite well that any West-end florist would have engaged her at once, just for the attraction her face would be to customers.

The Baronet registered a resolution not to lose sight of his perplexing little maid—at any rate for the present. She was infinitely more trouble to him than the little child he had anticipated, and yet somehow Sir Ira was not altogether dissatisfied with the charge that had come to his share.

CHAPTER V.

DOROTHEA HARDY and Sir Ira Vernon, neither of them, ever forgot that spring evening when they met for the first time. The Baronet did not refer again to his ward's future; he talked of other things; he told her stories of the days when he and his sister lived at the Grange, and delighted in his turn to her recollections of the pleasant watering-place where her childhood had been spent.

"I was very angry at first with Sir George for wanting to marry mamma," she admitted, "but I forgave him afterwards, because he made me so happy."

"Then you approve of matrimony, sometimes."

She looked puzzled.

"I suppose it makes some people happy, but it must be very tiresome. Fancy knowing beforehand, that, however long you lived, you must spend your days with one person!"

"But if you loved that one person!"

Dolly shook her head.

"I suppose it would be different then, but I don't think I believe much in love, Sir Ira. In books, you know, the heroine always feels unhappy directly she is in love."

"I suppose you think so, too," said the girl, frankly; "for mother told me you had no wife. Didn't you ever want one, or did she die?"

"I never wanted one, Dolly."

"And you are happy?"

Sir Ira hardly relished this question.

"As happy as most people, I expect. It is getting dark, Dolly; if you take my advice you will go to bed. A good night's rest will set you

up again, and make you look at things more reasonably."

He never forgot how the girl's blue eyes lingered on his face.

"Good-bye, Sir Ira," she said, in her sweet, musical voice; "I think you have tried to be kind to me; you have kept your promise to my mother."

"I will keep it now and always," he answered, gravely. "From this night forward, Dolly, your happiness shall be my care. Good-night, my dear."

Before she was aware of his intention he had stooped and kissed her on the forehead. She answered nothing; she never reproved him for the caress, but a vivid crimson dyed her face, and without a word she hastened from the room.

Left alone, Sir Ira threw himself on the sofa and tried to solve the problem. He had assured Dorothea her future should be his care—he meant it so to be; but how he was to form a home for a grown-up young lady in no wise related to him puffed his utmost ingenuity.

If only his sister Isobel had been a different sort of a woman the matter would have been easy enough; she could have received the orphan, and a liberal allowance from himself would have been all that was required, but now this was impossible.

Lady Clare would have punished Dolly for her mother's audacity in wedding Sir George. No, whatever happened, that was clearly out of the question.

After all, the best plan would be to leave the young lady at the Grange, at least for the present, and engage some gentlewoman of refinement and education to act as her companion and chaperone.

It was not a very satisfactory arrangement, but it was probably the best he could make; and with that reflection Sir Ira went to bed, to have his dreams haunted by a little figure, with a pair of dark blue eyes and golden hair, floating round her like a veil.

It was late when he went to bed—as a natural consequence it was late when he awoke. The dining-room clock pointed to ten when he went downstairs to breakfast.

He saw the table was laid for two, so he decided Dolly, like himself, had been dilatory.

It was a lovely April morning; the soft spring breeze came in through the open window, the sweet spring sunshine flooded the room with brightness.

Sir Ira thought he had never seen the apartment look so inviting.

There were no men-servants at the Grange, none had been needed by the late Lady Vernon.

The lodge-keeper performed such offices as were beyond the maids. Mrs. Hill herself had waited upon Sir Ira the day before, so he was not surprised to see her enter in answer to his bell.

"Will you tell Miss Dolly I am waiting breakfast?"

Then, as he noticed the old woman's troubled face,—

"Is there anything the matter?"

"She is gone, Sir Ira!"

"Gone! Who?"

He felt too sure of the answer, but he would not believe the fear that had come to him.

"Miss Dolly, sir! I did not send to call her until a few minutes ago, and then I found she was not in her room."

"She has gone for a walk, perhaps!"

"No, sir; her bed has not been slept in, and her room looks as if she had been packing."

Sir Ira followed the housekeeper upstairs to a small chamber furnished with great simplicity, and looking just fit to be the abode of a young girl.

The pretty white bed had not been occupied, but drawers were open, dresses lay on a chair. It was evident a careful selection had been made of the orphan's most cherished possessions; probably it had been a hard task to her to decide what to take and what to leave.

That was how Sir Ira explained the disarray.

To him, that pretty room, with its innocent confusion, was a touching sight.

He could not blame Dolly; he understood so well how her sensitive heart shrank from receiving benefits from a man she had learnt to think of as harsh and unfeeling; but oh! how he wished she had trusted him.

There was no farewell letter—no line or message. Ira remembered her farewell to him the evening before—how she had substituted “good-bye” for his “good-night.” Even then she had planned it.

Even if he had never seen her it would have pained him that she had put it out of his power to keep his promise to her dead mother; but now that he had spent a few hours in her presence—that he knew what an innocent sweet-faced child she was—the thought of her wandering alone in the great wilderness of London life was terrible to him.

He turned to Hill for comfort.

“Surely you have some clue?” he said, testily. “Of course you know the address of some of Lady Vernon’s friends!”

The housekeeper shook her head.

“I don’t think she had any, sir.”

“Nonsense!”

“My lady never wrote to anyone, no one ever came to see her; she and Miss Dolly were just all the world to each other.”

“There must be someone!” cried Sir Ira, hotly. “She couldn’t run away unless she had the hope of finding a friend somewhere.”

But Mrs. Hill opined that the dear young lady was too upset to think of that.

An hour later she brought her master the news that the fugitive had been recognised at the railway station, and that she had taken a third-class ticket for London. Sir Ira left for the metropolis by the next train.

He drove straight to his lawyer’s, and confided the facts of the case to the senior partner, a shrewd, business-like man, who had served the Vernons for many years.

Mr. Ball listened attentively.

“It’s easily explained,” he said, at once. “There is a lover at the bottom of the young lady’s flight.”

“I am certain you are m’staken.”

Mr. Ball laughed; he really could not help it.

“It would be the most natural thing in the world, Sir Ira!”

“You have not seen her.”

“Pardon me, I have had that pleasure. I had the honour of being at your father’s marriage with Mrs. Hardy. If the little girl who was introduced to me then as Miss Hardy has in any way fulfilled the promise of her youth, I should say there never was a face more calculated to win love and lovers.”

“She is very beautiful!” admitted Sir Ira; “but she is a child, Ball, a perfect child.”

“I will institute every inquiry. The matter shall be thoroughly investigated, so that you have no need to reproach yourself with not having done all that is possible.”

The Baronet looked at him haughtily.

“You had better understand me, Ball. I don’t want Miss Hardy found from any morbid idea that I am responsible for her flight. I want her found because I regard her as a sacred trust from her mother.”

“Those trusts are inconvenient sometimes,” said the lawyer, blandly. “I really think the young lady has relieved you of a very uncomfortable responsibility by running away.”

“The young lady,” cried the Baronet, angrily, “is too pure and innocent to know the dangers and sorrows she may have to encounter in her flight. Thank Heaven, if she is an orphan she is not friendless. I shall grudge no money, no expense, to find Lady Vernon’s daughter, whom I regard in the light of a younger sister.”

“Your sentiments have changed, Sir Ira!”

It was impossible not to see a tinge of sarcasm in Mr. Ball’s manner, impossible not to observe, for some reason or other, he was anything but friendly to Dorothea Hardy.

“I think,” said the Baronet, rising, with stately pride, “I have made a mistake in coming here. A stranger would better have understood my anxiety; a stranger would not have dared to

minimise the loss of an orphan girl I was bound to protect and care for could be in any way a subject of relief to me.”

Mr. Ball felt he had gone too far.

“Well, I have no cause to think favourably of the young lady, Sir Ira; but, of course, I will do my utmost to further your wishes.”

“I don’t suppose your opinion will affect Miss Hardy. May I inquire how she offended you?”

“Offended is, perhaps, too strong a word!” said the lawyer, affably. “You may remember upon the occasion of your father’s death several communications passed between you and his widow, through us.”

“I remember perfectly.”

“I could not always spare the time to go to the Grange myself; my son was, therefore, my representative.”

Sir Ira fairly loathed Mr. Ball, junior, whom he always described as a concited cad. He was quite prepared now for the cause of the lawyer’s aversion to Miss Hardy.

“David is naturally impressionable, and, being caught by Miss Hardy’s pretty face, he—”

“Insulted her by offering to marry her, I suppose!”

“It was no insult,” said the lawyer, stiffly. “My son is heir to an ample fortune, the young lady is penniless. She treated his offer with the basest ingratitude, and Lady Vernon wrote me a very peremptory letter, requesting me in future to hold all business communications with her through the post. She was rude enough to say her daughter’s youth should have protected her from my son’s persecution. She actually used the word persecution, Sir Ira!”

“I have no doubt it was deserved, Mr. Ball. We think very differently on this matter; and as it does not do for a man and his lawyer to hold contrary views, I will thank you to send all the papers relative to my estate to me at once, with your bill to the ensuing quarter!”

“He must want to marry the girl himself,” said the crest-fallen lawyer, when the door closed upon Sir Ira. “Impertinent little baggage; an though my son wasn’t much too good for her.”

“Hateful parvenu!” muttered Sir Ira, as he walked downstairs. “Fancy that wretched David daring to lift his eyes to Dolly, poor little girl. Why she must have been a mere child then—only sixteen. Well, I shall find you some Dolly, if I spend my fortune in the attempt. I only pray it may be before sorrow and care have dulled the brightness of your blue eyes. Ah, little girl you would have done better to trust me. I think I could have made you happy!”

And it never dawned on him his interest in Lady Vernon’s daughter was other than that of a sober, middle-aged guardian or elder brother; he never suspected that just as the mother had stolen his father’s heart, so Dolly’s blue eyes had conquered his own, and that the strange, restless longing which troubled him was neither compassion, pity, nor generosity, but simply and solely the passion he had so long foresworn—the sentiment he had declared it was not in his nature to feel—in a word, love!

CHAPTER VI.

THE Lady Marguerite Yorke was truly happy in her engagement, after all her fears and doubts of being married for her money. To meet with an open generous nature like Ronald Thorne’s was true delight.

She loved her soldier-lover with all the intensity of a heart which has found but few on whom to spend its affection. She knew that he was true, that if some wondrous chance had suddenly deprived her of her fortune his tenderness would have been just the same—unchanged and unchangeable.

They were to be married in July; their courtship, therefore, would last little over three months.

Marguerite told him it was too short for an engagement, but in her heart she was not sorry that she would so soon be his for ever.

Even as it was she knew she would miss him sadly when he returned to Woolwich, and, from

being constantly with her, his visits grew comparatively rare.

He was to rejoin his regiment the very day on which Sir Ira Vernon quarrelled with his lawyer, and through some formality of drill or review he had to put in an appearance at a wonderfully early hour. It was barely nine when he came to bid his *fiancée* farewell.

The girl looked up at him with tears gleaming in her soft eyes.

“Ronald, I shall miss you so!”

He put his arms round her. He pressed her to his heart, and told her again and again how he, too, felt the parting, and then he spoke of that glad joy-day which should unite them for all time.

“But you will write to me?”

“Can you doubt it! And I shall come and see you too. Daisy, my queen of flowers, don’t you know you are all the world to me!”

He kissed her once more, and slowly unfolded his arms from about her. A minute more and Marguerite was standing alone at the window watching the retreating figure of her lover.

She did not cry or sob. She seemed outwardly very calm. Her cousin, Mrs. Melville, was visiting her husband’s relations prior to her departure for India; and so, but for her guardian and his wife, Lady Marguerite was alone.

Mrs. Asherton was a kind, well-meaning woman, but she had never managed to understand the young heiress.

“You will be dull now!” she said, affectionately, when she came in and found her ward alone. “We must try and find some nice young friend to come and stay with you.”

Daisy shook her hand.

“I don’t want anyone, thank you, Mrs. Asherton. I am quite happy.”

The elder lady smiled.

“But Mrs. Melville will soon be leaving us, and I am not much of a companion for a young girl like you. Remember, Lady Marguerite, if you think of anyone you would like to ask, I shall be delighted to welcome her.”

“I think you spoil me, dear Mrs. Asherton.”

She sat on, half lost in a day-dream, half thinking of her lover, and travelling with him in imagination the road that lay between London and Woolwich; and so three hours passed awfully enough. It was almost lunch time when a servant entered.

“A young lady is asking to see you, Lady Marguerite! My mistress thought you would not like to be disturbed, but she was so anxious that I was sent to tell you.”

Daisy opened her eyes. In all London she knew no girl sufficiently intimate with her to call in this uncircumstantial fashion.

“Who is it, Simmonds?”

“I don’t know, my lady.”

“It is a lady!”

“Oh yes, my lady; she is very young, and she seems tired out, as if she had come from a great distance. She said she was quite sure you would see her, but she would not give her name.”

Daisy’s curiosity was aroused.

“Show her in here, Simmonds!”

Another moment and there entered a girl almost three years younger than Marguerite—a child with dark blue eyes, masses of gold brown hair, and the sweetest, saddest face you could picture. She went straight up to the heiress.

“Oh Daisy, dear!” she cried, in a voice half-choked by sobs. “Do tell me you haven’t forgotten me, and you’ll love me still, for I am so miserable.”

(Continued on page 597.)

THE Yellow River is styled the “Sorrow of China.” It is estimated that its floods in the present century have cost China 11,000,000 lives.

MADELINE GRANT.

CHAPTER XIV.

LADY RACHEL JONES and Madame Panier between them soon entirely metamorphosed the appearance of Miss Grant; and she took to her new silk-lined, elegantly-made dresses and mantles and tea-gowns with astonishing rapidity; also to her landau and pair, victoria and cobs, diamonds, French maid, and prize pug.

The latter was not a specimen of dog she specially admired or fancied; but her father paid a long sum for Cupid, and presented him to Madeline simply because he happened to belong to the type which was the fashion, and he looked well sitting beside her in the vacant seat in the victoria, with his black mousle, orthodox moles, and apoplectic, staring, bull-frog eyes.

And what about Hugh Glyn during the time that his wife is revelling in all this luxury.

He has been making rapid strides on the road to recovery; he is nearly quite well. The end of his sojourn with the friendly farmer's family is now drawing perceptibly near.

He has, now and then, a letter from Maddie, as she finds means to post them with her own hands—letters full of description of her new life, and her new friends, and of all the wonderful new world that has been lately opened to her view.

She, who never was at a dance excepting the two "breaking-up" parties at Mrs. Penn's; who never was in a theatre excepting on that fatal evening, has now been living in a round of gaiety, which has been whirling faster and faster as the season has waned.

Miss Grant has already become known, has been noted by great and competent connoisseurs of beauty.

Her carriage is pointed out in the Row, her table littered with big, square, monogrammed envelopes and cards of invitation, too numerous far to accept; and Miss Grant, "the beautiful American heiress," as she is called, has opened many doors by that potent pass-key—her pretty face, and admitted not only herself, but also her proud and happy father.

Maddie does not say all this in so many long sentences to Hugh.

She has not been afraid that he would be jealous, dear fellow—oh! no; but she feels that there is a certain incongruity between his circumstances and hers just at present, and she will not enlarge on her successes more than absolutely needful.

Yet a word drops out here and slips in there, and tells Hugh far more than she intends or imagines.

Besides this, Hugh is clever. He can draw inferences—he can put two and two together—and in the long August evenings, as he strolls about the fields alone, he has a great deal of time for thinking, and these are not very happy times for Hugh Glyn.

Now and then he ventures to write to No. 2, Solférino-Terrace, and Mrs. Kane kindly encloses his epistle in an envelope and re-directs it, in a most scrawling hand, "to Miss Grant, 205, Belgrave-square."

And Miss Grant eagerly snatches the letter from under the pile of nicely-written on big envelopes, plunges it into her pocket, and reads it greedily alone.

For although she is a little bit carried away by admiration, money, and power, yet a letter from Hugh puts all other pleasures completely into the shade, as yet.

This is his last that she holds in her hand, written after a long evening's meditation, and with many a pause, between the sentences:—

"Holt Hill Farm.

"MY DEAREST MADDIE,—

"Your welcome letter is at present lying before me, and now that the whole household are asleep, and that there is not a stir on

the premises, nor a sound except the loud ticking of the kitchen clock, I sit down to write to you without fear of being disturbed, for this, my dear Maddie, is going to be a very important epistle.

"I am truly glad to hear that you are so happy—that your father shows that he has an affection for you, and that you and he are no longer strangers, but getting on so extremely well.

"I hope that his tenderness will be able to survive the news you have to tell him, and must tell him soon, viz., that you are married.

"I can quite understand how you are dreading the evil moment, and can enter into your feelings of shrinking reluctance to dispel this beautiful new life—this kind of enchanted existence, with just one word, and that word to be uttered by your own lips.

"But if you are averse to mentioning this one fact, that must come to light sooner or later, let me take the commission on myself. I will speak to your father. I will bear the brunt of his disappointment and indignation. After all, we have nothing to be ashamed of. If I had known that you were the heiress of a millionaire I never would have ventured to marry you, of that you may be sure. But under other circumstances it was different.

"In the days when you had neither father nor home I offered you mine, such as it was. There was no disparity between our two lots in life such as has yawned between us since.

"Maddie, you will have to choose between your father and me—between riches and poverty.

"If your father will not listen to the idea of your having already changed your name, you must let me testify to the fact, and if he shuts his doors on you afterwards, you are no worse off than you were a year ago.

"If I thought you would ever have such a terrible fight to live as you had last spring I would not be so wicked as to wish you to leave your present luxurious home for my humble root.

"But things look brighter. I am, thank Heaven, now restored to health. I have been 'remembered.' I have an immediate prospect of employment.

"Our dark days are, I trust, a thing of the past. I am going to set to work again next week. I cannot endure the idea of living here in idleness and on your father's money; for although the whole of our stay here has cost less than you say he has given for a dog, still it is his money all the same—money for your education—money diverted from its original use—money expended on a fraud.

"Let us be open and above board and honest, and have no more of this secrecy and double-dealing, and now that we have once more got a foothold in life and on the means of living, I believe I shall be able to scramble up the ladder yet.

"I wish I could give you a fourth of the luxuries you have now surrounding you. I would pawn years to do it. But if I cannot endow you with diamonds and carriages and dress, I can give you what money cannot buy, Maddie, an undivided heart, that loves you with every pulse of its existence.

"Now I have said my say, I only want a line from you to go at once to London and lay bare the whole of the secret to your father. It is the right thing to do. You cannot go on living this double life, and your real home is with your husband and child.

"It is two months now since you drove away down the lane that evening with Farmer Holt—two long, long months to me, Maddie.

"You have had plenty of time now to make an inroad in your father's heart. You can do a great deal in that way in less than two months; and if he is what you say, he will not be implacable when he hears that you no longer bear his name, but have changed it for another nearly two years ago.

"You say he thinks so much of good blood and family. At least in this respect the Glyns should please him. He will find out all about us in Burke.

"We are barons of the twelfth century, and there is still a title in the family.

"The candle is going out and I must say good-night, but I could go on writing to you for another hour.

"The text of my discourse, if not sufficiently plain already is, 'let me tell your father of our marriage.' One line—one word—will bring me at once to town.

"I am, your loving husband,

"HUGH GLYN."

Madeline read this letter over very slowly with rapidly changing colour.

Some sentences she perused two or three times, and when she came to the last word she recommenced at the beginning, then she folded it up, put it in its envelope, and thrust it into her dressing-case, and turned the key.

She was a good deal disturbed; you could see it by her face as she went and stood in the window, playing with her watch-chain, with a frown upon her brow and a heightened colour in her cheeks.

How impatient Hugh was! Why could he not give her time? Six weeks was nothing to prepare papa!

Then her eyes slowly travelled round the luxurious apartment, with its pale blue silk hangings, inlaid satin-wood furniture and Persian carpet, her dressing-table loaded with silver toilet necessaries, a huge, silver-framed mirror, draped with real lace of immense value, silver-backed brushes, great cases of scent; and she thought, with a shudder, of the poor little room at No. 2, with its rickety table, shilling glass, and jug without a handle.

She walked over to her dressing-table and took a long, deliberate look at herself in this magnificent mirror.

How different she looked to poor, haggard, shabby Mrs. Glyn—the slave of a sick husband and a screaming baby, with all the cares of a home on her young shoulders, with no money in her pocket, no hope in her heart, no friends, no future.

Here she beheld Miss Grant radiant with health and beauty, her glossy hair exquisitely arranged by her deft-fingered Josephine, her pretty, slim figure shown off to its greatest advantage by a simple-made, but artistically-cut thirty-guinea gown, lace ruffles at her neck and wrists, diamond rings on her fingers, diamond solitaire earrings in her ears.

She had just risen from a most dainty little luncheon, where she was served by three powdered footmen and the bishop butler.

Her carriage even now stood waiting at her door, with its haughty-looking, champing, six-hundred guinea horses.

She was about to call for an earl's daughter, who was to chaperone her to a flower *file*, where from previous experience she knew full well that many and many a head would be turned to look after the beautiful Miss Grant—and she liked to be admired!

And Hugh wanted her to give up all this—to rend the veil from her secret, and stand before the world once more shabby, faded, insignificant, Mrs. Glyn the wife of a penniless barrister.

She was very fond of Hugh.

"Oh," to her own conscience, "do not think that I can change to him, but oh! the contrast is so awful between that other life and this. He must give me a little more time. He must—*he must!*" she reiterated, passionately, to her beautiful reflection in the glass. "Once papa knows, I shall be thrust out into outer darkness, I know I shall."

And this was the girl who two months previously had eaten dry bread, had pawned her clothes for her husband's necessities, had walked miles to save twopence!

Sudden riches are a great trial of the moral fibre, especially when they raise a girl of nineteen at one bound from poverty, bordering on starvation, to be the mistress of unbounded wealth, and the daughter, the only child, and heiress of a lavish, open-handed millionaire, with thousands as plentiful with her now as coppers once had been.

"I will go down and see him, that what I

shall do," she murmured, as she rang her bed-room bell, preparatory to putting herself in the hands of Josephine.

"Letters are so stupid. I will take the first chance I can get when papa is absent, and run down to the Holls for an hour or two, and tell him that he must wait, he must be patient."

And so he was very patient, as day after day he waylaid the postman, who seldom had occasion to come up to the farm, and still there was no letter.

Madeleine was daily intending to rush down to the farm, and day followed day without her having the courage to carry out her purpose, and still Hugh waited—waited with more than masculine patience; and then he began to think that she must be ill.

A whole week and no letter. He would go to town and inquire. Yes, no sooner thought than done.

Fear and uneasiness now took the place of any other feeling; and hurriedly making a change in his clothes, and leaving a message for Farmer Holt, he started off to the station on foot, and took a third-class return to London.

Once there he made his way, and a long way it was, to the fashionable precincts of Belgrave-square.

It was a very hot afternoon—the very pavements were grilling, the air oppressive. People were beginning to talk of Cowes and Scott-hood.

Still, many gay equipages were dashing about fashionable quarters containing society notabilities and brilliant parasols. One of these swept round a corner just as Hugh was about to cross a street. He had only a fleeting glimpse as it dashed by.

A landau and pair of bay "steppers," with what is called "extravagant" action, powdered servants, two ladies in light, sunnery-looking dresses, and bonnets to match, and a young man in lavender gloves on the back seat.

One of the ladies had a look of Madeline, but it somehow could not be her. This was a languid LouLou beauty, half reclining under a large lace parasol, who looked as if she had been accustomed to such an equipage from the days of her perambulator.

It was only a passing idea, and quickly dismissed by Hugh, as he once more walked rapidly on.

At length he came near the house, to the same side of the square, within three numbers now.

His heart beat rather fast, and he glanced up. None of the upper blinds were pulled down, he observed, with a sense of relief, and then he took in the dimensions of this palatial mansion, with a porch and pillars, conservatory, billiard-rooms and buildings built out here and there wherever they could be crammed.

The awnings were up—gay red and white striped ones. Banks of flowers bloomed in the windows. Oh! what a contrast to No. 2, Solferino-terrace. Would not Madeline see it, too? he asked himself with a pang.

After a moment's hesitation, he rang the bell, and almost instantly the door was opened by a tall, supercilious-looking Jeames.

"Is—is Miss Grant at home?" stammered her husband, with heightened colour.

"Not at home," said the footman, in a parrot voice, holding out his hand for the card that he presumed would be forthcoming.

"Is she quite well?" ventured the visitor.

"Quite well, sir, thank you," having studied the visitor, and come to the conclusion that he was "not one of your nobodies," like his worthy master.

"Who shall I say called?" he asked, condescendingly.

"It is of no consequence," muttered Hugh. "I have forgotten my card-case," turning as he spoke, and slowly descending the steps.

This was a rum proceeding in Jeames's eyes. He might have at least have left his name. But no. Jeames stood in the doorway for a moment or two looking after him as he walked slowly away. Then he glanced sleepily round the big, hot-looking square, yawned, and went in to study the paper and the latest betting on Goodwood.

Hugh made his way to Mr. Jessop's chambers,

and found that gentleman very busy, and, as he said to himself, "up to his ears."

He, however, "knocked off" for the time being, to have a smoke and a chat with his old friend, whom he declared that he found looking as fit as a fiddler, and requested to know when he was going to put his shoulder to the wheel again.

"Lots for you to do, my boy! Martin has married an heiress and cut the concern. My son has married a son of old Baggs, of the great firm of Baggs and Kemp, and my fortune is made and of course I'll give you a hand. There's that case of Cranford and Cox coming on next week."

Hugh did not clutch at these agreeable openings. He puffed away moodily at his cigar, and looked out of the window in a rather abstracted fashion. His keen-eyed friend noted this, and said in quite another tone,—

"And what about Mrs. Glyn?"

His companion looked at him quickly and coloured faintly, knocked the end off his cigar, and said nothing.

"She has not told the old gentleman yet?"

"No."

"I know that I saw her at the opera last night, the cynosure of all eyes, with her proud and happy father noting with delight that half the opera-glasses in the house were fixed on Miss Grant. Ahem! How long is it to go on—this little comedy—eh?"

"I can't tell you," impatiently—"not another hour, as far as I am concerned. I don't wish her to sail under false colours any longer; I came up to see her to-day——"

"The deuce you did!" in blunt amazement.

"But she was out."

"I suppose you saw the house and the style, eh? By Jove! It's like Royalty. I dined there last week."

"You did!" in a tone of unfeigned astonishment.

"Yes, your humble servant. I've met Mr. Grant at my club—he knows a friend of mine, and all that."

"The dinner was a banquet. I had the honour of being presented to Miss Grant—of course I never saw her before"—winking at his friend—"and I declare I scarcely knew her. Dress and diamonds and manner—manner begot of importance, appreciation, wealth and good surroundings—not that Mrs. Glyn's manners were not always those of a perfect gentlewoman—but there's a difference in doing the honours of a red herring in an attic, and of being hostess in Belgrave-square, and presiding over a French dinner, real silver plate, and the entertained of lords and ladies, and bishops and ambassadors, eh? and doing well, too. But wherever she got her good blood, Hugh, it was not on her father's side. I sometimes feel inclined to run my fork into him, or choke him with the table-cloth. He is so blatantly proud of his success, his money, his grand acquaintances, and, above all, his daughter. He is, excuse me, a little cad."

"You think he will be furious when he hears that he has a son-in-law?" asked Hugh, gravely.

"If you were a lord, or had some handle to your name——"

"But as I have nothing—not even Q.C.!"

"I think, from what I know of him, he will be unpleasant, my dear fellow—very unpleasant."

"And will turn Madeline out-of-doors as the first shape his unpleasantness will take!"

"Yes, most probably."

"Well, she has her own home, at any rate. I shall set to work on Monday. I'll go round to my chambers now, and put everything in train. You can send me in those papers, and tell Tom, the clerk, I am coming back for good. I shall take lodgings, as soon as I have looked round, in a more cheerful neighbourhood than Solferino-terrace. Mrs. Holt will keep the child till we are settled."

"You mean you and—and Mrs. Glyn?" looking curiously at his companion.

"Yes; who else should I mean?"

"Does she say anything about coming back?"

"No—o; but it's understood."

Here ensued a short silence, during which

Mr. Jessop was nervously to speak his mind to his friend—to speak for his good, an unthankful task, but he told himself it was his duty.

"Hugh, old chap, you and I've been friends since we were in jackets at Harrow, and I've been your sworn ally since the day that you kicked big Thompson for pitching into me. We've always stuck together somehow ever since, and I think a great deal of your concerns, and what hurts you hurts me—I must say one word to prepare you, old man," suddenly laying his hand on his companion's shoulder. "It is too bad to be sanguine about things in this life. Don't—don't be too sure that she wants to come back."

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN Miss Grant returned from her drive, down to a well-known cricket-ground, where she had been surrounded with admirers like flies round a pot of honey, and had reclined very much at her ease in her landau, whilst the most excellent party were outvying each other in endeavouring to win a way to her good graces, one brought her tea, another ices, another strawberries; one held her parasol, another fanned her, and Lady Rachel, who had her own diversions, looked on, and said to herself,—

"That Madeline was becoming too much run after, and Levante would have to mind what he was about."

Meanwhile, from a distance, Mr. Grant looked and hugged himself with joy as he saw a baronet, a lord, and finally a marquis hanging round Madeline in turn. It was just as it should be! Then he went up to Levante and said,—

"I say, Levante, wasn't that the Duke of Monmouth I saw you talking to just now, old chap—man with a white hat and reddish face?"

"Yes, I—I believe so," shrinking from what he knew was to follow—as per usual.

"Then, just when you get an opening, introduce me, there's a good fellow! Watch him when he comes out of the tent—eh? I'll do as much for you in another way."

This was understood; this meant a loss of some considerable sum, to be repaid at his lordship's own convenience, which would be never, and in this way Mr. Grant had made use of Levante, and actually bought introduction after introduction, accompanying him to all places of popular resort, up on race-stands, into cricket-tents, and establishing himself on Levante's shoulders as a veritable "old man of the sea," who would not and could not be shaken off, and who, through his own partnership and with the help of his cheque book, had more big names among his acquaintance, such as it was—a host—than many people who were far his social superiors.

His talk was chiefly of the aristocracy, and of "My friend the Marquis of Clavering," "My intimate friend, Lord Collingford," "My neighbour, the Duke of Dublin." The peerage was his craze.

People were a good deal surprised at first when this dapper, smartly dressed, keen-eyed little man was presented to them, and he bowed and talked, and talked and bowed, and "hoped your lordship was this, and your grace approved of that?"

What was he? Who was he? What confounded impudence! What was Levante about? He was always dining with a scruffy lot, but why thrust his seedy friends on them? What the deuce, &c., &c.

However, it soon came to be hinted abroad that the little man, Grant, was a millionaire—ridiculously rich—a second "Monte Christo," with as great a spirit of generosity as marked that nobleman, and the parent of a lovely daughter, sole heiress of his heart and home.

So Mr. Grant was no longer stared at or snubbed; he was received, he was encouraged to spend money; he was by no means a bad sort of fellow. And he was inordinately happy, excellent, and triumphant—he literally lived on air these summer days; and if Madeline, as she bid fair to do, married among his friends, he would

endow her with a fortune that would open their lazy-looking eyes, and he would have put the coping-stone on the summit of his ambition, and few people accomplish that.

"A gentleman calling to see her?" said Madeline, languidly, as she took off her gloves on the threshold of the morning-room. "Did he leave his card?"

"No, ma'am, he did not—said he had forgotten it."

"And asked for me, not for Mr. Grant?" she continued, indifferently; glancing, as she spoke at her parent, who was rapidly turning over a pile of notes, and picking out those emblazoned with a coronet.

"I'll tell you who it was," he broke in, "Lord Maitravers, come about the macaw he promised you, that's it."

"No, sir," put in Jeanne, firmly, but respectfully, "it was no gentleman as I ever saw before—certainly not Lord Maitravers, though he might be a lord for all I can say to the contrary."

"It wasn't a tradesman, eh?"

"No, sir," emphatically.

"What was he like?" inquired Madeline, opening a letter very deliberately as she spoke; her thoughts very far from Hugh.

"Well, ma'am, he looked quite a gentleman; he was about my 'ight' (complacently), very dark eyes; what you'd consider a 'andsome young man.' He carried a queer-looking cane with an ivory top, and he looked disappointed as you were not at home."

"A queer-looking cane with an ivory top, and he looked disappointed;" the letter fluttered out of Madeline's hands and fell to the ground, as the unconscious Jeanne thus informed her that her husband had been calling that afternoon. She was glad enough to stoop quickly and hide her face, with its sudden rush of colour.

Hugh had then come up to see her. What insane rashness, what madness!

"Well!" exclaimed her father, looking at her sharply, "have you made out your mysterious visitor, eh—eh—eh?"

"I think he must have been one of my school-fellow's brothers, from the description," said Madeline, with wonderful composure, now tearing open another letter as she spoke.

"Humph!" said Mr. Grant, in a tone that showed that schoolfellow's brothers were not at all in his line.

"Here's an invitation to Lord Carbuncle's for Thursday," said his daughter, rapidly turning the current of his thoughts into a much less dangerous channel, and holding out the note for his perusal.

"Thursday—Thursday. Let's see, eh?—what's for Thursday?"

"We dine with the Wilson-Jones's in Portland-square."

"Oh! dear me, yes," querulously, "so we do. Can't we throw 'em over? What a nuisance," in a tone of exasperation.

But his daughter gave him no encouragement, knowing full well the enormity of throwing people over when a better engagement presented itself, and that such proceedings were not endorsed by people in "good society"; so Mr. Grant, who was cheered by another coroneted invitation, had to submit to fate with the best grace he could muster.

Next morning Madeline resolved upon a bold step on her own part. Her father was going to attend a small but aristocratic race-meeting, and she announced that she was going to spend a long and happy day in the country with some worthy old people whom she had known a good while and who were not in papa's line; and immediately after she had seen her parent safely off the premises she went upstairs and dressed herself very plainly, put a black veil in her pocket, also a well-filled purse, and set off for Waterloo-station in a hansom. This time she travelled first-class, of course, and hired a fly to take her to the farm, at least to the lane near the farm. Mr. Holt would drive her back, and she wished to give them all an agreeable surprise.

Mrs. Holt, who was shelling peas in the

kitchen in a yellow bowl, gave a little scream when she beheld Madeline standing on the threshold between her and the sunshine, and upsetting half the pods rushed at her hospitably, wiping her hands in her blue apron, and assuring her that she was "as welcome as the flowers in May." Baby was well and growing beautiful, but Mr. Glyn was out. He and the farmer had gone after breakfast together, she could not say when they would be in." Her square brow knit with sensible disappointment when Mrs. Glyn, in answer to her eager queries, informed her that she was not come "to stay;" that, in fact, she was going to Scotland the day after tomorrow with her father and a number of friends.

"Aye! dear me," exclaimed Mrs. Holt, after a long pause, "and what will Mr. Glyn say to that? I'm thinking he will not be for letting you go," she added, dubiously.

It was just this very subject Madeline had come to discuss with him, and now he was away for the day—as very tiresome and provoking.

Mrs. Kane had been won over with money. Miss Penn with valuable presents, and the hint of an invitation; there remained only Hugh to deal with. He must learn to be patient, and to wait for the auspicious moment, when, having gained the whole of her father's affection and confidence—when he began to feel that she was necessary to his well-being, his happiness, his social success, and that he could not ever spare her—then, and not till then, she would throw herself into his arms and confess to him that she was married to Hugh Glyn; and Hugh and the baby would be brought to Belgrave-square in triumph, and share her lot in basking in the sunshine of wealth and prosperity. This was Madeline's neatly-planned little programme, and meanwhile she repeated to herself ten times a-day "Hugh must wait."

She nursed the baby and praised its rosy cheeks, and asked many questions about her husband; but Mrs. Holt remarked that she took no interest in the chickens, the calves, or the dogs, nor in what she once found so delightful—the garden or the dairy.

Mrs. Holt's quick woman's eye did not fail to notice her blazing diamond rings when she pulled off her gloves, her beautiful new watch, which she consulted nervously from time to time, her plain but expensive dress, with all its appointments so very complete, even to the colour of the border of her handkerchief, and her neat silk stockings. Ah! she could see that—although she tried not to show it—Mrs. Glyn was changed, her mind was poisoned by riches; and he, poor young man, would never be able to keep her contented, now she had known what it was to be a great lady. Mrs. Holt shook her head doubtfully.

Madeline carried the baby down to the gate and looked out for Hugh, but no Hugh came, and baby was extremely heavy; then she went round the garden. She made her way into their sitting-room, with its old mahogany glass bookcase, rush-bottomed chairs, brass-faced clock, samplers hanging on the wall, and plain red tiles under foot, and with a lovely summer breeze playing with the little white curtains through the open lattice, and the great high hollyhocks and sunflowers rearing up their tall heads as if trying to peep in from the garden. There was Hugh's writing just as he had left it; there was a well-known pipe; there in a corner stood the very stick that had betrayed him! On the spur of the moment she called in Mrs. Holt, and made over the baby to her motherly arms, and instantly sat down to write Hugh a letter—a letter with his own pen, indited at his own table.

"DEAR HUGH,—

"I came down to see you, and am very sorry you are out, for I cannot wait, and I had so much to talk over. I am so glad to find baby looking well, and to hear such accounts of you. I believe you were at Belgrave-square yesterday. Hugh, what a rash visit it was; but fortunately no one suspects you or has the least idea that you are anything to Miss Grant. I feel quite another person now. I am down here in the country, looking out of this window in front of

me, in this dear old garden, and the far-away peaceful wooded hills.

"I feel as if money was not anything in comparison to youth and health and peace, and that I could be happy here always with you; but I know that once back in my own boudoir this very self-same evening I shall change my mind once more, and look upon a rustic life as intolerable, and living here as being buried alive; but I shall never change about you, Hugh—no fear of that. I got your last letter quite safely, and have carefully laid to heart all you say; but dear, dear Hugh, you must let me take my own time with papa. I will tell him, sooner or later. I am really the best judge of how, when, and where. Leave it all to me. He will come round yet, and we shall all, like the good people in the fairy tale, 'live happy ever after.'

"On Saturday night we all go to Scotland for two months. We go by the night mail from King's Cross. Papa has taken a lodge and shooting in Perthshire, and we are to have a succession of visitors. I hope to do great things in these two months, and will write to you very often and report progress—Ever, dear Hugh, your loving wife, M. G."

His loving wife put this effusion into an envelope, and directed it, and left it on the mantelpiece, where it would be sure to "catch his eye," and then she felt considerably relieved in her mind and heart, and had tea in the kitchen with Mrs. Holt, turning the cakes and praising the butter, and softening Mrs. Holt's feelings more and more the longer she stayed in her company. Then she had a confidential chat about baby and his clothes, and placed twenty pounds in Mrs. Holt's hands for his wardrobe, in spite of that good woman's emphatic assurance "that it was four times too much." She also made the farmer's wife a substantial present in money, telling her very prettily, with tears in her eyes, that it was not in payment of her kindness, for no money could pay for that, but as a small mark of gratitude.

By various means she reinstated herself rapidly in Mrs. Holt's good grace; and having hugged and kissed the baby over and over again, and taken a hearty leave of the farmer's wife, she once more turned her back on the Holt Hill, and set out for her father's luxurious mansion in Belgrave-square.

Luckily for herself, she was home long before him; was dressed, and sitting half-buried in a chair, and engrossed in a novel when he came home, in an unusually good humour. He had been winning and losing in the best of company, and was very full of a certain Roman prince, who had been uncommonly pleasant, and "said he would like to be presented to you, Madeline!" he exclaimed, exultantly. His little hard head was so full of this new acquaintance that he never had room for a thought about how or where his daughter had spent her day; indeed, from all evidence to the contrary, she might never have been out of the house.

Hugh found Madeline's letter staring at him from the mantelpiece when he came home. He snatched it eagerly, and devoured it then and there, and as he came to the last line his sensations were those of bitter disappointment. Yes, and something more. He was hurt. There was an under-current of jaunty indifference, he declared to himself bitterly, that cut him to the quick. And she was going away for two months. Well, any way, he would see her off—the station was a public place. She need not see him, but he would see her; and the next day he carried out his intention, travelling up to town early in the afternoon, visiting his chambers, dining with his friend Jessop, and being all the same a full half-hour too early at King's Cross. He watched and waited, and saw many likely-looking parties approach, but yet they, his particular party, came not, till within five minutes of the train starting.

And what a fuss they made!—more than all their predecessors put together. There was one footman running for tickets, another



THE LETTER FLUTTERED OUT OF MADELINE'S HAND AND FELL TO THE GROUND.

being madly carried down the platform in tow of two huge porters. One retainer had the booking of the luggage, another was arranging the interior of their Pullman sleeping car, and then the party themselves came up to it, and Hugh beheld his father-in-law for the first time—a neat, trim, fussy little man, talking vociferously, and gesticulating about "Lord Robert's luggage."

There was a very well-dressed dark woman—not young, but juvenile enough in air and style—who laughed and talked to a big man in a tweed suit, and looked at Mr. Grant with a contemptuous grimace, and shrugged her shapely shoulders; there was a "lout" in checks, so he mentally ticketed Lord Levantier; there was a girl, not remarkable for anything but a very tight Newmarket; there were two ladies' maids; and there was Madeline, last, not least—Madeline, so changed that he would hardly believe his eyes.

Madeline was dressed in a long travelling mantle and hat to match, holding a fat pug by a chain, and giving languid directions to hurrying footmen and maids, and dispensing smiling adieus among a group of young men who had come to see them off, meaning her off.

This was not surely his Madeline—the little school-girl he had married, the devoted, struggling, hard-working wife and mother of No. 2, Soferino-Terrace!

He stood back for a moment in the shadow of a big bookstall, and realized for the first time the immense gulf that divided him from Mr. Grant's heiress, the great yawning chasm that lay between him and Madeline. What would fill it—what? He could think of no bridge but money.

Very bitter were his thoughts as he stood thus—poor, aloof, and alone—whilst his radiant wife made her beaming farewells from the window of the Pullman car.

"She should say good-bye to him, too," he said to himself, with a sudden fierce resolve; and stepping forward he stood in the full light, a little apart from the gay young men, who were

now removing their hats with a real or simulated air of regret as the train slowly began to move that was to carry the popular heiress northwards.

Madeline smiled and nodded, and waved her hand. But who was this also removing his hat, this young man standing a little apart, further down the platform? It was Hugh—Hugh that she had not beheld for more than ten weeks. It gave her quite a shock to see him, but a pleasant shock, that sent her blood tingling through all her veins.

How well he looked, and how well he contrasted with those young members of the crutch-and-toothpick school whom she had just, she hoped, seen the last of!

She would have blown him a kiss had she dared; but her father's little beady eyes were on her, and she could only sit and look. She might not even bow.

Then with a sudden compunction, and justly alarmed by the expression of his face, she looked quickly out of the window and waved her hand, and smiled.

The others promptly accepted this signal with demonstrations of rapture. Little did they guess that it was not for them, but for that quiet gentlemanly-looking fellow a few yards to their left. If they did not know this he did.

"Who is that man on the platform?" said Lady Rachel, "that looks as if he was seeing us off, for there is no one else in this car but ourselves," in a tone of complacent amusement.

"Oh! I don't know, I'm sure," responded Mr. Grant. "There are a heap of people further up, all going north. He belongs to them. I daresay he belongs to the Ravenswood party; Lord Ravenswood is in this train. It would not surprise me if he was his nephew, Lord Arthur Dacre. Distinguished-looking sort of chap; and took a good long look at you, eh! Maddie!" facetiously. "Will know you again next time he sees you, eh! Highly delighted at his conceit. I suppose you have no idea who he is, eh?"

Madeleine had an excellent idea of who he was,

but this was no time to confide her secret to her parent, better to save this social bomb for a more discreet opportunity.

Madeleine had a very shrewd idea that the mysterious gentleman, who had taken a good long look at her—the presumable Lord Arthur Dacre—was her own husband!

(To be continued.)

A CURIOUS industry in some of the provinces of China is the manufacture of mock money for offering to the dead. The pieces are only half the size of real coins, but the dead are supposed not to know the difference. To make them, tin, hammered out till it is not thicker than the thickest paper, is punched to the size required and pasted on discs of cardboard. A boy then takes the pieces, and with two dies, one representing the one side and the other the reverse, hammers impressions of coins upon them, and the money is ready for use.

FORCE OF HABIT—Burke relates, that for a long time he had been under the necessity of frequenting a certain place every day, and that, so far from finding a pleasure in it, he was affected with disgust; and yet, if by any means he passed by the usual time of going thither, he felt remarkably uneasy, and was not quieted until he was in his usual track. Persons who use snuff soon deaden the sensibility of smell, so that a pinch is taken unconsciously and without any sensation being excited thereby, sharp though the stimulus may be. After a series of years, winding up a watch at a certain hour, it becomes so much a routine as to be done in utter unconsciousness; meanwhile the mind and body are engaged in something entirely different. An old man is reported to have scolded his maid-servant very severely for not having placed his glass in the proper position for shaving. "Why sir," replied the girl, "I have omitted it for months, and I thought you could shave just as well without it."



JOCELYN AVENAL WAS JUST PREPARING TO KNOCK OFF WORK AS DOROTHY DREW NEAR.

POOR LITTLE DOROTHY.

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CHAPTER VII.

DICK PEYTON would have felt more induced than ever to say "poor little Dorothy" if he could have been present at a conversation between his cousin and Miss Lester a day or two after the fete at Peyton Royal.

Dorothy had felt very troubled the evening after she had declined her first proposal. Though Lovel Dolby was a shocking bad match for an heiress, and Miss Lester was generally very prudent, the girl had an undefined feeling that her aunt would favour his suit. Still, when a day or two had passed without an allusion to the young man, Miss Peyton took heart of grace and decided he had kept his own counsel and not confided his rejection to Aunt Janet.

Vain hope. On the third morning just after breakfast when Dorothy came down in her picturesque white hat, ready to make a call on the Fortescues, Miss Lester detained her.

"Come in here, Dorothy; I want to speak to you seriously for a few minutes."

Dorothy hated the room into which she was invited. Miss Lester's work room was plain and uncomfortable. A big sewing machine and cutting-out table occupied the places of honour. The latter was already strewn with lengths of unbleached calico, and the coarsest sort of serge. Miss Lester made a great many garments for the poor, and was thought a very charitable lady. True, she chose the very barest and most uncomfortable makes of calico, the ugliest and homeliest of material for dresses and cloaks. No one seeing a girl or woman equipped in Miss Lester's handwork could have taken them for anything but charity garments.

In days gone by Dorothy had often pitied the unfortunate village children when they received a "Sunday frock." She pitied them still. She had always hated the room, it was associated in her mind with punishment and scolding. She

was too old for the first now, but she felt sure the second was to be her portion.

"I heard from Mr. Dolby this morning, Dorothy," said Janet Lester sharply. "I suppose there is no need for me to tell you the contents of his letter?"

"I am not in the least interested in Mr. Dolby's letter," said the girl, wilfully misunderstanding her. "He is your friend, Aunt Janet, not mine."

"It's no use fencing with me, Dorothy. I know everything and I am not to be deceived. Mr. Dolby did you the honour to ask you to be his wife, though you have tried to keep the secret from me."

"I think it is bad form for a girl to boast of the proposals she declines," said Dorothy, proudly, "even if they are as undesirable as Lovel Dolby's!"

"You had no right to refuse him," said Miss Lester, severely. "You had given him quite enough encouragement to make him think you cared for him."

"I!" and Dorothy's face was fairly crimson with anger. "Why, Aunt Janet, you have often scolded me for being rude to him. I don't like Mr. Dolby. I never have liked him from the first. I was only civil to him because he was your friend."

"What fault can you find with him?" demanded Miss Lester. "A clever honourable young man with great talents and a very handsome face. What can you possibly want more?"

"I—I don't find fault with Mr. Dolby; only I don't care for him. I don't even like him in an honest friendly fashion, much less feel for him as a wife should feel for her husband."

"Nonsense," said the spinster tartly. "What should you know of a wife's feelings. Lovel Dolby is sure to distinguish himself in the world. With your money any position would be open to him."

Dorothy shook her head.

"I don't see that he can have my money without also having me, and nothing in the

world will induce me to be his wife. I can't imagine why you are so anxious for me to marry him, Aunt Janet."

"I am not in good health, and I wish to see you safely provided for before I die."

She looked very far from dying. A handsome woman still and in the very prime of life and strength it was hard to believe she could really mean what she said, and Dorothy kept silence in amazement.

"Is there anyone else?" asked Miss Lester after a long pause. "I have tried to guard you from undesirable acquaintance and to protect you from fortune hunters, but I have never had your confidence; you may have entangled yourself with some mercenary scoundrel unknown to me."

Dorothy drew up her pretty little head with a haughty gesture of indignation. The heiress of Peyton Royal might not resemble either parent, but she carried her pedigree in her face, and showed her high descent in her voice and manner. It would have been quite impossible to mistake Dorothy for anything but a damsel of high degree.

"I am sorry you should have such an opinion of your dead sister's child," she said coldly. "No, I have no entanglement such as you suggest; but I am in no hurry to marry anyone. I am only twenty. I have a beautiful home and plenty of money, so I don't see why I should not enjoy myself as I am for a few years. In any case I shall not marry Lovel Dolby, I don't like or trust him."

"You will learn your mistake," said Janet Lester bitterly, "I will not reason with you now. A day will come when you will passionately regret your rejection of a good man's wooing. Now go; I have a great deal to attend to, and your presence irritates me."

Dorothy waited for no second bidding; she was only too glad to escape, and very soon she was out-of-doors, but she could not quite shake off the memory of that interview. Her aunt's angry face and bitter prophecy haunted her; it was

as though for her the glory of the September day had departed. Even the summer sunshine could not give her back the radiant spirits in which she had been prepared to start before her summons from Miss Lester.

"If only I had someone to love me," thought the poor lonely child, "someone who really cared for me myself, not for the heiress of the Peyton's. I can't help wishing sometimes father had not made Aunt Janet my guardian. If I had only been brought up in a family with girls of my own age, I shouldn't have had time to fret over things so. I never had a girl friend in my life. Aunt Janet wouldn't let me even play with the Fortescues when I was a child, and now—well, there is a sort of gulf between us. I don't remember my money, but they don't seem able to forget that I am rich and they are poor. If I had only had a sister," and the girl gave a heavy sigh, "how different my life would have been."

It was not far from Peyton Royal to the Vicarage, which stood very near the lodge gates. As Dorothy reached the broad avenue of linden trees she suddenly came face to face with a stranger, a young man with a frank open face, a pair of merry blue eyes and dark curly hair. He was no one she had ever seen, of that she felt quite sure, but he lifted his hat and addressed her.

"Miss Peyton, I believe?"

"Yes," said Dorothy quickly, "but I am afraid I do not remember you."

"You couldn't," he said, smiling, "for this is our first meeting. I am a wandering artist, and am staying at Matching for a few days so as to sketch some of the surrounding scenery. I have been told that your park has many spots which I should long to transfer to canvas, and I was on my way to ask your permission to sketch them."

"I shall be very pleased," she said with a shy feeling that Aunt Janet might try and gainsay her. "The trees are looking very beautiful just now. Their foliage is such a lovely colour."

"Then I may return to the inn and fetch my impedimenta," he said, frankly turning to walk by her side, "but I ought to introduce myself, Miss Peyton. My name is Jocelyn Avenal, and my greatest friend is a namesake of yours—Dick Peyton. I rather fancy you may be cousins."

"I have cousins," replied the girl, "but I have never seen any of them. I hope you may find some suitable views, Mr. Avenal," and then with a slight bow they parted at the vicarage gate.

"So that is the heiress," thought Mr. Avenal. "She does not look particularly happy. Why Dick's sisters, who in the old days had hardly a penny to bless themselves with, were a much jollier set. Perhaps wealth is a burden after all, I'd try to think so when my grandfather threatens for the ninety-ninth time to disinherit me."

Dorothy met the Vicar on his own doorstep, and he took her into the house.

"My wife will be pleased to see you. She has someone to show you, Miss Peyton. I tell her you may not care for the acquaintance, but she is anxious to introduce you to one of your cousins who has come over to spend a few days with us."

Dorothy felt that the world was coming to an end. Here was Mrs. Fortescue actually sitting unoccupied in her own drawing-room at the early hour of eleven, and opposite her, looking just a little wearied, was one of the very handsomest young men she had ever seen.

"It is terrible that you two should be strangers," said the Vicar's wife in her kindly voice.

"Carl, this is your cousin Dorothy. Miss Peyton, this is your Uncle Charles' son."

"His second son," said Carl, with such a stress on the adjective Dorothy felt he regretted the fact it conveyed. "Mrs. Fortescue kindly asked me to come over, knowing how anxious I was to see the stronghold of the Peyton's. Of course, you have been brought up to detest us all," he added, with an engaging smile, "but don't you think you and I might be friends?"

"I should like to be," she said simply, "I never

could understand why I have never seen any of you."

"It's a very short story," said Carl, carelessly. "Long ago my father and yours quarrelled. They made it up right enough before Sir Douglas died; but your aunt, Miss Lester, never liked any of us, and so she chose to ignore the reconciliation, and carry on the feud if such a one-sided branch could be called so."

"I wish she hadn't," said Dorothy, earnestly, "you can't think how I've longed to have some relations younger and pleasanter than Aunt Janet. Oh, I know she's very good to me," went on Dorothy, in reply to a reproachful glance from Mrs. Fortescue; "but it's only because she thinks it's her duty. She doesn't care for me really a scrap."

"Miss Lester has a cold manner," said the Vicar's wife; "but I believe she loves you very deeply, Dorothy, and certainly she has devoted her life to you."

"I wish she hadn't," said the heiress, so ruefully that both her listeners smiled.

"Well, I mean it," she persisted. "If only I had gone to school I might have made friends; but Aunt Janet has kept me aloof from everyone, till I really feel the loneliest girl in the world."

"Do you think I may be allowed to call on you, Cousin Dorothy? I may call you so, mayn't I? Miss Peyton sounds so stiff."

"Please call me Dorothy; I like it much better. I should like to ask you to come to Peyton Royal when you leave the Vicarage; but," her cheek flushed crimson, "I am afraid I mustn't. You see Aunt Janet is awful when she is put out. She might freeze you by her icy courtesy."

"I see—but I may venture to call!"

"Yes, only if she is not nice you won't think it is my fault or that I can help it."

"I will never think anything unkind of my Cousin Dorothy," he assured her. "I think I had better not make that call till just before I go home. You see Miss Lester might forbid you to see me during the rest of my stay."

"Shall you be here long?"

"Only the inside of a week. Then I must go back to the Hut till it is time to return to my treadmill in London. I am that most miserable of things—a Government clerk."

Dorothy opened her eyes.

"I thought they had such an easy time of it!"

"Not in my department, I can assure you. The authorities are veritable Shylocks, expecting their pound of flesh or the exact amount of work they bargain for; but you see there are five of us at home, and so we can't be particular."

"Have you any sisters?"

"Three, and a most immaculate elder brother, a sort of epitome of all the domestic virtues, now isn't he, Mrs. Fortescue?"

"I am very fond of Dick," said the Vicar's wife, "and he is devoted to your mother."

"He is so good," remarked Carl, "that I am always afraid he will not be spared much longer to this wicked world. Then I had better complete the picture-gallery Cousin Dorothy. My eldest sister married a man with a pot of money, who worships the ground she walks on. The next is a wonderful finishing school, and the youngest is the family plaything and torment. I am never quite sure in which capacity Lulu most distinguishes herself."

"Lulu! what a pretty name!"

"And she is a pretty child. The one next before her (a boy) died as a little thing, and so we have all spoilt Lulu conscientiously, lest she should follow in his footsteps. Now, do you feel as if you knew us?"

"How I should like to know you all really," and her eyes glinted; "and you don't live so far off; really King's Aston is only an easy drive. Why won't Uncle Charles come and see me?"

Carl shook his head.

"Because he has a very big share of the family pride, and as you are rich and we are poor he would be afraid of his motive being misunderstood. Why, even I was a little afraid of being snubbed by my heiress-cousin!"

"Dorothy never snubbed anyone in her life," said Mrs. Fortescue, decidedly.

"Please don't talk like that," said Dorothy;

"if you only knew how I hated my miserable money. I should like to fling it all into the sea."

Carl shook his head.

"You'll learn the value of it soon enough, young lady," he said, impressively.

Dorothy took her departure soon after. In the present state of her aunt's temper it would have been dangerous to be late for lunch. Only when she had reached the linden avenue did she remember she had quite forgotten to tell Mrs. Fortescue of her meeting with the young artist.

Miss Lester was ice itself at lunch. She made Dorothy so nervous she could hardly swallow the dainty fare provided; while the silence was so exasperating to her strained feelings that she simply longed to scream as a relief to the deadly quietness.

Only when the butler had retired Janet said icily,

"Did you give a vagabond painter permission to plant his easel within full view of the house?"

"Yes; he asked me, and I—"

"You jumped at the chance of showing you were the mistress of Peyton Royal," retorted her aunt. "It is just what might have been expected of you; you are the most ungrateful, disrespectful girl I ever met."

Dorothy's lip quivered.

"I had no thought of vexing you, Aunt Janet. Mr. Avenal asked my leave and I gave it; if I had thought it would annoy you I should have refused. He seemed a perfect gentleman and told me he knew one of my cousins very well."

"To know the Charles Peyton's is no recommendation in my eyes," said Miss Lester; "why, their mother was actually lady-help at the vicarage before her marriage. Mrs. Fortescue paid her fifteen pounds a-year."

"Poor ladies have to work," said Dorothy, "and I expect they were very good to her at the Vicarage. Was she so very pretty that Uncle Charles fell in love with her?"

"She was just like a wax doll," said Janet Lester, slowly. "Of course it was more her fault than his; she made a dead set at him. Well, she didn't gain much by her wiles. For years they were in abject poverty, and even now she has come into some money they are wretchedly poor for their position."

"I should so like to go and see them."

"You would like to do a great many improper things. Sir Charles and Lady Peyton have never expressed any desire to know you; it is one of the few sensible things they have done."

"But it is so near, Aunt Janet; we might just drive over and call."

Miss Lester looked at her keenly.

"You will never visit them with my consent. If you are wise you will never seek their acquaintance. Do you not know the terms of your father's will?"

"I know he left me everything he had."

"Yes; but if you die unmarried before your twenty-fifth birthday, or if you die at any time childless, this place and its revenues pass to Sir Charles Peyton's eldest son. You said once, Dorothy, I did not care for you, but I have far too much affection for you to expose you to such risk. The Charles Peyton's have the strongest possible motive for wishing you to die young."

"Oh, I don't, don't," pleaded poor Dorothy, with startled, horrified eyes. "It is too dreadful. Why should they want to injure me?"

"Because you stand between their son and great wealth. Your father left you to me, Dorothy, and I have done my best to guard you from those who are your natural enemies. I have kept you as secluded from society as possible lest by accident you should meet any of the family or their spics. You asked me this morning what need there was for you to marry young, and I put you off with an indifferent answer. You shall know the truth now. Until you are a wedded wife—nay, more, until a child is born to you, your life is in danger; it stands between young Richard Peyton and twenty thousand a-year!"

Shuddering, the unfortunate heiress crept away to her own room. At first she was utterly overwhelmed. At first she believed her aunt's story implicitly; it was only when she had wept till she

had no more tears left, that as she grew calmer, she was able to "look at the other side."

For this awful story she had no proof but her aunt's word, and she knew Miss Lester to be previously prejudiced against Sir Charles Peyton and his wife. Might not her morbid fancy have imagined the awful thing she had told Dorothy as a truth? The girl thought of the young cousin she had met only that day, and his frank, cheery greeting, his many allusions to his own home, she thought of the kindly way in which Mr. and Mrs. Fortescue always spoke of the present Lady Peyton. Surely the woman they had loved so well, and the man who had sacrificed all his future prospects for her sake, could not have the vile purpose Miss Lester imputed to them.

Poor Dorothy longed for a friend—a confidante. If only there had been any living creature within reach she could have trusted, her burden would have lost half its weight. Now she was between two alternatives either full of pain—on the one hand she must believe that the aunt who had brought her up had lied to her and invented a horrible story to account for her efforts to force her niece into a loveless marriage; on the other, she must credit such a wild idea that her father's nearest kindred sought her death because she stood between them and wealth.

"But I will never marry Lovel Dolby," said Dorothy to herself, "even if Aunt Janet's awful story is right. My life is in Heaven's hands, and Providence can guard me from all my enemies; but the other alternative, to live all my life with a man I fear and dislike, is far worse—besides, I don't believe, I can't believe that this plot against me exists. Aunt Janet has led such a dull solitary life, she has brooded over her dislike to my Uncle Charles till she has come to think him a monster of iniquity."

She met her aunt again at tea. Perhaps her swollen eyes and tear-stained cheeks told how sadly she had fretted, for Miss Lester's manner was far kinder than usual, and she even made no objection when Dorothy said she thought a little fresh air would be good for her headache.

It was an intense relief to Dorothy even to be out-of-doors. The soft air fanned her hot cheeks and cooled her burning eyelids. She hardly knew where she went, but her steps turned instinctively towards the bowing green, and then on to the banks of the lake.

Someone was there before her, Jocelyn Avenal, who had been painting steadily for some hours, was just preparing to knock off work and fold up his easel, which was of the newest and most portable make.

He saw at once that Miss Peyton had been crying. Why, she looked to him only the ghost of the girl who had talked so brightly to him in the morning; but Jocelyn had far too much good breeding to let her perceive he noticed the change. He had, moreover, that wondrous gift of tact which is more valuable than any mere cleverness. The orphan heiress was lonely and in sorrow. He must not seem to see it, but if a little cheerful conversation could distract her thoughts, there was no reason against it.

"You see I have availed myself of your permission," he said, simply. "I think I never saw such a lovely spot so near London. You must indeed be proud of your home."

"This is my favourite spot in the grounds," she answered. "I like to watch the lake and see the willows reflected in its water. It is so calm and peaceful. I think I could quite understand any one's wanting to forget their troubles in those silvery waters."

Avenal shook his head.

"But they wouldn't escape the trouble really. They would have to meet them in eternity; and it is a cowardly thing to fling away our life because it is not all sunshine. Besides, there is not a living creature whose death would not make a void in some human heart."

"I don't think any one would miss us much," breathed the girl, speaking more to herself than her companion, but Avenal answered her,—

"You'll grow wiser when you get older, Miss Peyton. Now I have no relations in the world except an irascible old grandfather, who quarrels with me on an average four times a year. He

has just had a particularly bad outburst, and solemnly renounced me for ever, telling me to depend entirely in future on my palette and paint brush. But you see I'm pretty cheerful considering. I don't expect my work to hang on the walls of the Academy yet awhile, but I mean to try and make an independent career for myself."

"It's different for a man," said Dorothy, slowly, "they can go wherever they please, and strike out a line for themselves."

"But your line is a very fair one," he suggested. "Do you know when I first saw this place I thought the owner of it could not have a care?"

"She has a great many."

"Of her own making!" and his smile robbed the question of any rudeness.

"I don't think so. Mr. Avenal, you said this morning you knew some of my relations."

"I know Dick Peyton—Sir Charles' eldest son. I never met any more of the family. The second brother, Carl, they call him, is rather a boomer, but Dick's as true as steel."

"Do you know he is my hair?"

Jocelyn Avenal burst out laughing.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Peyton, but I could not help it. It is too absurd for you to talk of Dick as that. Why, he must be half-a-dozen years older than you are to begin with; and so far from building on your premature decease, he has just settled down as assistant to a country surgeon. He is devoted to his profession, and very clever at it. Your hair? why the dear old boy would be quite lost as a rich man; and so far from the bare possibility of such a thing having entered his head, he told me once his very highest ambition was to be a London doctor and earn eight hundred a-year."

"I must be going in," said Dorothy; "my aunt may want me. I hope you will take as many sketches here as you please, Mr. Avenal."

But the artist did not thank her; he had not the chance, poor young man! Before he could utter a word, a sharp turn in the alley brought them face to face with Miss Lester, her face white with rage as she seized her niece's arm with no gentle hand and asked,—

"What is the meaning of this, Dorothy? How dare you steal out of your home like this to secret meetings with a stranger? As for you, sir," turning to the luckless Jocelyn, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself! And if you dare to show your face again, my servants shall turn you out of the grounds like a common tramp."

CHAPTER VIII.

JOCELYN AVENAL came of a good old family, and if his grandfather attempted to keep him in undue subjection, the old gentleman at least insisted on his grandson being treated with perfect respect by all his dependents.

Jocelyn inherited four hundred a-year from his own father, and no could manage to keep himself even if disinherited by his irate relation. Meanwhile, society in general made much of the handsome young fellow. He was popular wherever he went, and courted as much for his good looks and pleasant ways as for his grandfather's wealth, so that Miss Lester's insolent speech took him utterly by surprise; he had never in his life been spoken to so rudely. His first thought was that the angry woman must be out of her mind, his next that she simply treated him according to his apparent circumstances, and that this was the reception he might expect to meet with as a "strolling artist." For his own part he would have disclaimed a reply, but pity for Dorothy's white, shamed face made him answer,—

"I think, madam, you are under a mistake. My meeting with Miss Peyton was purely accidental. As to your last remark, I was under the impression that Peyton Royal belonged to your niece; and that the grounds were consequently at her disposal."

Miss Lester's face simply blazed with anger.

"Do you dare defy me to my face?" she

cried, furiously. "Leave these grounds at once, and never let me find you here again!"

He gave one glance full of respectful pity to poor little Dorothy, then, with head erect and a scornful light flashing in his eyes, he walked past Janet Lester with no more notice than if she had not happened to be visible.

Dorothy Peyton stood perfectly still just where he had left her. She uttered no reproach; spoke not one single word, but she stood there as motionless as a statue, while on her white, set face was an expression of despair which would have touched a gentler heart.

It did not touch Miss Lester's, but it made her feel decidedly uncomfortable. She wished the girl would scream or go into a rage. She would have preferred the most passionate reproaches to this strange, stony calm.

"It is getting late," she said at last; "you had better return to the house."

"To my prison!" breathed Dorothy, coldly; "that is what you have made of Peyton Royal for me. A prison, where I am a captive; where my every word and act is spied upon; where I have less freedom than the meanest servant—that is what my father's home has become to me!"

"Ungrateful girl!" replied Miss Lester, "when my whole life is devoted to you."

"I wish it wasn't," said Dorothy, sadly. "Aunt Janet, can't you keep Peyton Royal and all the money, and let me go away? I should be far happier working for my bread than here, where I am a captive—a captive in a gilded cage, I grant you, but still a captive!"

"By your father's will you are left under my care until you reach the age of twenty-five," said Miss Lester, "unless you marry. You know as well as I do that you might be married next month if it pleased you."

Dorothy said nothing. She was not a suspicious girl, but she was wonderfully clear-sighted, and her aunt's last words had given her the key to the situation. Miss Lester meant to make life so intolerable to her at Peyton Royal that she would be ready to catch at any chance of leaving it. Since all other means had failed she was to be driven into marrying Lovel Dolby just as a way of escape from her aunt's rule.

She went upstairs to her own room. The next feature in the order of her day would have been to dress for dinner, but she waved her maid (who appeared punctually at the stroke of seven) impatiently away.

"I am not going downstairs to-night, Rhoda, so I shall not need to dress."

"Have you a headache, miss?" asked the girl, kindly. "Shall I fetch you a cup of tea?"

"No, I want nothing at all, thank you, Rhoda, only just to be quiet."

It was a very pretty room. Janet Lester, who had excellent taste, had chosen a suite of three rooms when Dorothy grew up, and refurnished them for her niece. The sitting-room was the largest of the three, and besides an inlaid bureau and book-case had a small cottage piano, a big luxurious sofa, chairs and table for every requirement while the ornaments were just suited to a young girl's sanctum, save that on one wall hung two pictures in massive gold frames which somehow looked rather too heavy for their surroundings. They were the portraits of Sir Douglas and his wife painted by no mean artist, and almost lifelike in their fidelity.

Dorothy had never prized the pictures as most girls prize the likenesses of their parents. She could not of course remember her mother, but she could and did recall that her father had been more than indifferent to her, that he had never caressed or petted her in life, and that in dying he had not even troubled himself to say farewell to her. As a child this memory had chilled her; as a woman it gave her a strange dull feeling of resentment.

Sir Douglas had lived in the same house with Janet Lester for years. He must have known how hard and cold she was, how unloving and uninteresting, and yet he had left his daughter utterly at her mercy.

Dorothy's musings were aroused at this point by a low tap at the door, her aunt marsh now to be dinner, a formal affair never interfered

with ; besides, the summons was far too quiet for Miss Lester.

"Come in," said Miss Peyton with a sigh, half sorry to be disturbed, half glad Rhoda cared enough about her to refuse to leave her without another effort to make her take some food. It was not the maid, however, but a much older person who came quietly in, closing the door after her. Mrs. Gibson was not far off seventy, and had well-nigh completed her jubilee of service at Peyton Royal. She had come there as a little under nursemaid in the time of Dorothy's grandmother ; she had been successively head nurse, lady's maid, and housekeeper. Even her marriage made no difference to her services since she wedded the butler who had been as long with the Peyton's as herself. They had no children of their own, and so perhaps their devotion to the family grew to be the ruling feeling of their life.

"Miss Dorothy," said Mrs. Gibson kindly, "I've brought you some cold chicken which you must please eat to please me ; and, oh, my dear young lady, what is the matter, you're as cold as ice, and there's a look on your face which ought not to be on one so young."

"I'm in great trouble," said Dorothy, stroking the old woman's hand, caressingly. "Oh, Gibby, I hope my mother wasn't like Aunt Janet, for I'm afraid I hate her."

So did Mrs. Gibson, but she was not going to acknowledge it just now.

"Your mamma was just a bright, tender-hearted girl, Miss Dorothy. She worshipped the master and he her. She'd but one regret in life that she had no child, and when you came, Miss Dorothy, she seemed too happy for this world. But, as you know she didn't stay here much longer, and I've heard the maid who was with her in Italy say that the one thing which troubled her when she was dying was that she could not take her baby with her. 'It was only a little girl,' she said, and her husband had so wanted an heir he would not care for the child just because she was not a boy, and besides, the baby was small and sickly, she would never thrive without her mother."

"I wish," began Dorothy, hurriedly, but Mrs. Gibson stopped her.

"Don't go to say what's in your mind, Miss Dorothy. There'll be happiness in store for you some day ; but you were the most delicate baby that ever lived, and Miss Lester, she just devoted herself to you. When the old doctor ordered sea air, she left here and took you to Brighton. She stayed away from her home and brother for the best part of half a year that you might grow rosy and strong by the sea, and sure enough those months at Brighton saved your life. You never ailed anything since you came back to speak of."

Aunt Janet may have loved me long ago, but she doesn't now."

"She's not one to show her feelings, miss, and she's had a sight of trouble."

"Was it love trouble ?" demanded Dorothy, with more interest than she had shown before.

"Why, my dear young lady, whatever made you think of that ? Miss Lester always seems to me a born old maid, the last person one would think had had a sweetheart."

"I fancied," and Dorothy blushed, "that long ago Aunt Janet must have cared for Mr. Dolby's father, and that that was why she was so fond of him."

Mrs. Gibson shook her head.

"You're quite out of it, missie. No, years ago, long before ever you was born, Miss Lester was engaged to Mr. Charles Peyton."

"Gibby ! you can't mean it !"

"But I do. Lor, miss, I loved Mr. Charles almost as if he'd been my own, having nursed him from a baby, and I couldn't make out how even he came to fancy Miss Lester. Of course her sister made his brother perfectly happy ; but then my lady wasn't a bit like Miss Janet. Then some said it was her money ; but that I never would believe. I think, myself, being thrown a lot together, Mr. Charles just drifted into the engagement ; it pleased all his people, and there was no one than he liked better."

"And they quarrelled ?"

"Never, that I heard of ; but Mrs. Fortescue, at the vicarage, had a young lady as companion, a

pretty fair-haired little thing, and Mr. Charles soon found out he cared for her. I suppose he was a bit afraid what his brother 'd say so he kept the matter dark, and it wasn't till Miss Duran was his wife that he wrote and 'broke off' with Miss Janet."

"It was wrong, I suppose——"

"People said so," agreed Gibby ; "but there, Miss Dorothy, what sort of a husband would he have made your aunt when his head was full of some one else ?"

"And that is why Aunt Janet hates Sir Charles !"

"She doesn't hate him half as much as she hates his wife and children. Why, Miss Dorothy, all these years it's been gall and wormwood for her to feel that if you died before you'd a husband and family of your own Sir Charles's son must be master here. Down in the servants' hall we all thought you'd be married at sixteen just for that."

Dorothy laughed outright.

"It would have been a case of an infant's honeymoon, Gibby ; but I haven't the least desire to be married at all. Why shouldn't I be an old maid ?"

"You are a sight too pretty, deary," said Mrs. Gibson ; "and now I've been talking all this time, and you've never told me what's troubling you. Gibson says that when you passed through the hall with Miss Lester you looked like a ghost, and she had her hand on your arm as though you were her prisoner."

"I believe she thinks I am. Gibby, she makes me miserable. Sometimes I feel as if I must run away, as if I simply couldn't stand the way Aunt Janet treats me."

"You mustn't do that," said the old woman, prudently, "you're so young and tender, Miss Dorothy, you can't think of the sufferings that come to a girl without a home. Besides, Peyton Royal is your very own, and Miss Lester's no right to make you unhappy here. If either of you goes it should be her."

"If she went it would be delightful," said Dorothy. "I'd get some dear old lady to come and look after me, and if Aunt Janet did not go too far off she should come and see us once a month. She'd be so much nicer if I only saw her once a month, Gibby."

"Well, my dear," said the old servant, "may be she would, and though I'm only an ignorant woman, Miss Dorothy, there's a gentleman up in London just on purpose to take care of young people who've got money and lost their parents. Just to see you know they've a good home found for them, and are not put upon by their guardians." It was a strange definition of the Lord Chancellor's duties, but—just at first—it gave Dorothy a ray of hope. Too soon she remembered she had no specific charge to bring against her aunt. She could hardly complain to the Lord Chancellor that Miss Lester objected to her meeting a stranger in the grounds, or that she recommended her to marry young.

(To be continued.)

WOMAN TALKERS.—The woman conversationalist is usually more effusive than the male of her species. She takes her auditors more into her confidence. A gushing sympathy and personal interest are her capital instead of the good stories and the quick humour of which women are destitute. Having claimed you as her friend, she proceeds to show you what an acquisition you have made. She is ready to exhaust and settle for ever all questions uppermost in the community, whether it be the Indian problem, embroidered tides or universal salvation. The salient point to be noted in the men or women who are popularly known as fine talkers in this country, is that their material is really, as a rule, stale and second-hand. They have a verbal expertness in handling thoughts ; they give them out as liberally as the ploughman throws down the chopped fodder to his herd. But the thoughts are chopped and dried ; they bear the same relation to the simple utterances of a genuine thinker that the dry-cut stubble does to the green, live, growing corn in the field.

EVA'S. LOVE.

—:—

CHAPTER I.

It was a lovely picture that she made out in the old garden, under the apple-tree, with the snowy bloom falling in profusion about her. She was sitting upon the ground, her lovely, sunny head leaning against the gnarled, corrugated body of the deformed old tree, which bent under its weight of sweet perfume.

The man before her had pulled off great sprays of the exquisite flowers, until she was almost imbedded in them, and looked up at him with laughter in her blue eyes—blue as the cloudless sky above her.

"I cry you mercy !" she exclaimed in a tone clear and silvery as a sweet-voiced bell. "I shall be smothered in another moment. And besides, what desecration ! You are robbing the dear old tree of hundreds of its apples, for without the flower there can be no fruit."

"And after all you rob the flower of its beauty," he said, standing off to admire the effect. "It is absolutely nothing by comparison, Eva."

"Flatterer ! If grandma should hear you speak like that she would forbid you the grounds."

"Then I am thankful to Heaven that she doesn't hear !" cried the young man, ruefully.

"You are verily the spirit of Spring, Eva—the lovely nymph that has but to wave her magic wand and the birds sing, the rippling brooks leap to life, the flowers bloom, and all nature throbs in response. Heigh-ho ! How a fellow misses the opportunities of his youth, and only regrets them when a chance like this occurs ! There was a time when I was told that I possessed great talent as an artist, I wish I had cultivated it. I should be famous could I but reproduce you as you are."

He threw himself beside her under the tree, and taking a small spray of the flower from her hair, fastened it in his button-hole. She looked at him for a moment in silence.

"Do you think people are happier, Percy, for being famous ?" she asked at last.

He looked at her and laughed.

"Do you want to be famous as a special variety of orchid ?" he questioned, lightly.

She frowned slightly.

It was like a shadow crossing the sun.

"I couldn't be famous as anything," she returned, half sadly. "I wish I could ; but I have talent for nothing. Not one thing. But your father——"

"Oh, my father ! Well, you see, dear, he is different. He is—well, my father ! Certainly I don't think I would be happier to be like him."

"Why not ?"

The young man laughed again.

"You wouldn't want me to be bald, and fat, and fifty, would you ?"

"Are you ever serious, Percy ?"

"Yes, when I tell you that I love you."

"Which is something that you should not tell me, because you have been forbidden."

"It is the forbidden thing that are most fascinating always."

"Then if you have the privilege of telling me that without restraint, you would tire of it ?"

"You know I never should. If I were to speak until I die, I could never make you half understand."

She sighed—such a little fluttering thing—it was like the fall of a rose-leaf.

"I wonder, Percy," she exclaimed, softly, little above a whisper, and pulling at the white petals thoughtfully, "I wonder if it is not the romantic part of our meeting that has appealed to you ? A month ago you did not know me. You met me down by the old spring, where the craggy rocks make delightful valleys in the heart of civilization. There was a little flower born before its time, down beside the spring, and I was climbing after it when my foot slipped and my ankle turned. But for you, I suppose, I should have lain there and been a skeleton before I was found by anyone. You rescued me. It was necessary that you should

carry me—oh, by the way, Percy, I have often wondered how you managed that. I weigh a hundred and twenty pounds."

He burst out into a wild fit of laughter, and she looked at him with a sunny smile upon her own countenance.

"What's the matter?" she questioned.

"It was so absurd," he returned, "the sudden change from the reminiscences of a heroine upon the stage, to the every-day talk of asking how I managed to carry you. Suppose you let me illustrate by carrying you somewhere else! You were half unconscious that day, and could not see how gracefully I did it."

"Shall it be back to grandma?" she asked, regally.

"No; I'd give up the pleasure rather than that. What a queer old affair life is, Eva! We live out our troubles and begin again, as the seasons do, new and fresh, only that each year brings newer and greater capabilities to the soul, as each year brings sweater maturity to the fruit of the tree. Last winter I believed myself tired of the frivolities of the world. I thought myself *bland*. I was sceptical concerning the absolute enjoyment of anything; yet you have made me a boy again, filled with delight in the mere fact of living; bubbling over with happiness and youthful exultation. And it is all because I love you."

"Again! And you promised grandma that you would not say that again until my dear mother comes, and you have obtained your father's permission."

"I can't help it. What is a fellow to do when his heart is so full that it runs over and slips through his lips unawares? I wish I were worthy of you, Eva."

"Oh, nonsense! You are always saying that."

"Yes, I know. I think of it every time I think of you, and that is every moment of the day. When is your mother coming?"

"Grandma had a letter by the eleven o'clock mail. She says she may be here any day now; just as soon as she can get her business in condition to come. Oh, Percy! what will your father say?"

"He will say that you are the most beautiful girl alive."

"Oh, pshaw! I mean about my mother being a—milliner."

"He'll say that she must be a rattling good one, judging from your hate, I fancy," laughed the young man. "My father has great admiration for an artist, and your mother certainly is that if she fashions your head adornments."

"But—of course he entertains the old prejudices—"

"My dear Eva, you speak of my father as if it were absolutely essential that his consent should be obtained. I am not a dependent on the bounty of my father. I hope you never thought quite so badly of me as that. I have a fortune that came to me from my dear mother, but even without that I should be able to support my wife without the assistance of my father."

"But it would break my heart to enter a family in which I was unwelcome. You and your father have only each other. Could I come between you, Percy?"

"You have already come between us, my darling, whether you will or not, for if he were to condemn my happiness for a mere social folly, he could never be father of mine again. But suppose, dear, that your mother were to object to me?"

The smile lighted the lovely face like sunshine again.

"Ah, but she won't!" the girl answered.

"How do you know?" he persisted.

"Who could object to you, Percy?"

He caught her hand and kissed it passionately before she could prevent it.

"How do you suppose I shall ever be able to trust you when you break your word to poor grandma like that?" she asked, laughingly, yet pretending to chide.

"You won't expect me to keep such a promise to you," he answered. "But tell me. Suppose your mother should forbid our marriage, what should you say?"

"It is so perfectly absurd that I won't answer you," she returned, rising. "I know perfectly

well what she will say. It will be: 'Eva, my dear, he is charming, and I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart. The only wonder to me is that so handsome a man could ever have fallen in love with my little country lass.'"

Percy was up and beside her. He had slipped his arm about her waist.

"I am going to kiss you for that!" he cried, audaciously.

She endeavoured to escape him, but he held her closely, lifted her chin with his palm, and pressed his handsome lips upon her lovely crimson ones.

"You horrid, wicked man!" she cried, stepping back when he had released her.

He looked down upon her. He was paler than he had been, and there was a brightness in his eyes that she had never seen there before.

"It was the first in all my life, Eva," he said, softly. "The first time my lips have ever touched yours, and whatever life holds for either of us they shall never touch those of any other woman. Do you regret that I stole it now, darling?"

There was something in his voice which she could not quite comprehend, but it influenced her mood strangely. She felt suddenly quieted, all the coquetry taken from her. She laid her hand lightly upon his arm, and lifted her sweet face almost pathetically.

"I wish I had given you the first without resistance, Percy," she said, softly. "Somehow there is something that tells me that some day I shall regret not having done so. It would have been something always to remember. But it is too late now, dear."

He took both her hands and folded them upon his breast.

"It is not too late to tell me in words that you love me, Eva, and so make me a little happier even than I am. I know it, dear heart! You have let me see it in your eyes, you have not denied it when I have asserted it, but you have never said so yourself. Won't you say it now, Eva?"

He was looking at her wistfully, pleadingly. She gazed straight into his eyes, and answered, tenderly.—

"I love you, Percy, with all my heart and soul!"

CHAPTER II.

"Eva! Eva!"

The voice that called from the little vine clad plaza, where the purple wistaria was about to burst into life, trembled with eagerness and age. It reached Eva down under the apple-tree, and she sprang forward light as a fawn.

"It is grandma!" she cried to her attendant knight. "I must go at once."

He caught her by the hand before she could escape him, and drawing her towards him whispered softly,—

"Remember! Nothing can take you from me now. Neither time nor death can come between us now. You are mine, Eva."

She paused just long enough to lift the tips of her fingers and touch his cheek with gentle, lingering touch.

"I pray Heaven that nothing ever may come between us, Percy."

And then she was gone, like the breath of vanishing spring. He looked after her with a smile that merged into a sigh.

"She is as pure as the spotless white she wears," he murmured, as he caught the last flutter of her dress among the trees. "Ah, Heaven! if I could but cleanse my life, for her dear sake! I am but twenty-six years of age, and not worse than the average man, yet I feel like a sin-hardened criminal in her presence. I scarcely dare to touch her, lest I contaminate her with the pollution of the world. She has lived here among the birds and the flowers, a companion only of nature, until she seems but a breath from Heaven, whose fragrance I am not worthy to inhale. A little country lass! A sweet, pure, perfect flower!"

He lifted his hat and brushed the hair up from

his forehead with a little smile of absolute contentment.

"I wonder what the fellows will say when I take her back to town as my wife! That I am the luckiest dog alive, by Jove! and there will be no mistake about that. Heaven bless her!"

He wandered down by the fence and stood there leaning upon it, looking out over the rolling meadows green as emerald under the influence of spring, and stood there dreaming.

But Eva had rushed away to do her grandmother's bidding, happier than the bird in the branches of the spreading tree before the door that was fairly bursting his throat with song.

She saw her grandmother standing upon the piazza; but there was another form beside her, and with a wild cry of delight Eva hurried forward and threw herself upon that other's breast.

"Oh, you dear, darling mamma!" she cried, embracing her again and again. "Now, do stand off there and let me look at you, it has been such an age since I have seen you. Upon my word you are younger and handsomer than ever!"

And it was indeed a handsome woman upon whom she looked—a woman apparently thirty-five, although she might have been five years older, with that style and dash that would make her a conspicuous figure in any society.

Her hair was of that reddish chestnut that falls in great glistening waves upon the side of the head—hair a dozen shades darker than Eva's. Her eyes were as dark as midnight, and containing a passionate glow that somehow held one entranced.

They were lighted now as they rested upon the face of her beautiful daughter with a love as pure and true as ever burned in a woman's eyes. She held the girl off and looked at her also, then sighed slightly.

"You are growing to be a woman, Eva," she said, half reproachfully. "I shall not have a little girl much longer now, and—oh, darling, how sorry I am!"

There was undisguised sadness in the tone, but Eva laughed merrily.

"Did you expect to always keep me a little girl?" she added, kissing the beautiful face again.

"I don't think I expected anything," answered the elder woman, half warily. "But it saddens me. Mother, you should have told me how old Eva is getting."

The old lady laughed pleasantly.

"There are a good many other things I should have told you if you had not been coming so soon. It seems to me, Honora, that we see you more and more seldom. Is the business growing so that it requires all your time?"

Eva's mother seated herself with elaborate care.

"Yes, the business is growing," she answered, her tone so changed that no one would have recognised the voice. "Business always does either that or fail. What are the other things you should have told me?"

Eva and her grandmother exchanged glances, and both laughed, the one shyly, the other with some amusement.

"Your little girl, that is a little girl no longer, has been getting a lover since you have been away."

But neither of them was prepared for the sudden whitening of the mother's face, the drawing of her lips, the real pain that stood out from her eyes in bas-relief.

"Eva!" she gasped. "What are you saying? What are you thinking of, mother!"

Eva was already upon her knees with her arms about that well-formed waist.

"Ah, mamma, don't be angry!" she pleaded. "I didn't want grandma to tell you anything about it until you had seen him. I know you will like him and not blame me when you know him as we do, won't she, grandma. Oh, he is quite the—"

"Yes, I know all that. They always are," returned her mother, dryly. "But where did you meet this paragon? Mother, I thought I strictly forbade her going into any society!"

"I have not been," Eva hastened to exclaim. "He saved my life! There! I knew he would find favour in your dear eyes when I told you

that. Now, grandma, not another word until she has seen him for herself!"

But the delight of home-coming seemed to have been destroyed for Honora Masters. The smell of flowers that had so refreshed her upon her coming, seemed to cloy. Her lovely colour had all vanished. She answered their eager questions in monosyllables, and for the first time in her life asked none at all. She sat with Eva's hand clasped closely in her own, occasionally stroking the child's soft hair, and once or twice kissing her upon the cheek; but it was not the home-coming Eva had pictured, and it was a genuine relief to her when her grandmother announced that it was but half an hour until dinner would be served.

"I have asked Eva's Adonis this evening," she said to her daughter, "not knowing that you would not be at home until to-morrow. I hope you are not too tired to meet him!"

"Oh, no," Honora Masters answered, but nothing more.

Eva would have been her maid as she changed her travelling-dress to one of more home-like cut, but she would not allow it. It was not an elegant gown, the one she substituted, but it was cut fashionably, and a Worth creation would not have become her more.

There was just a trace of Eva's expression about her lips, and somewhere about the eyes, but not in colour—a resemblance which no one would have observed until their relationship was made known—but it was plainly evident when they were together. She descended the stairs alone before either of the others were dressed, and went out upon the balcony alone. She sat down behind the wisteria, and leaned her head upon her hand.

Eva no longer a child, and with a lover!

It seemed to her incongruous, impossible; but beyond that fact there was something else—something that touched her deeper, that seemed to strike the most discordant chord in her soul. She had aged since that announcement had been made to her. There were lines under her eyes that had not been there before.

"I have remained too long away," she groaned. "I should have been here to know what was happening. But I could not always keep her a child. My Heaven! I could not always keep her a child!"

Her chin trembled pitifully, and there were tears in her eyes as if the mere fact were agony to her. Her hands were pressed together, and clutched each other as if the mental strain were almost too great to be borne. And then suddenly she half raised herself and stared straight out before her with grief changing to horror.

She did not rise from her chair. She could not. She sat there as if suddenly turned to stone, and watched the swinging, graceful strides of a young man coming up the walk from the gate, a tall, handsome, athletic fellow, with a broad, massive chest, well-set shoulders, and a head carried with singular grace. She could not see his face until a sudden curve in the road revealed it to her, then a little cry escaped her which did not reach him.

With a tune from an opera still upon his lips, Percy Railton turned the curve and ran lightly up the steps of the piazza before he observed that there was a female presence there, then the song froze upon his lips, a wild horror sprung to his eyes, and falling back a step, he exclaimed, his voice low and hoarse with passion,—

"You here? What are you doing—here?"

The exclamation was not loud, but the silent voice made it penetrating. It seemed to pierce the horrible silence that had fallen upon Honora Masters. She was up from her chair at one bound and at his side, seizing his arm like a tiger.

"For the love of Heaven, not a word here—before her! I will tell you all when I can!"

And then there was just time for her to fall back in her old position, when Eva stood before them.

CHAPTER III.

WITH that oppression still upon her, which her mother had unconsciously left when she went up to dress for dinner, Eva stepped out upon the piazza. She went forward quickly and put out her hand to Percy.

"I am glad you have come," she said, with that winsome smile that was one of her sweetest charms. "I want you to meet my mother, and you have come upon her with no one here to present you. I beg both your pardons. Mamma, will you let me introduce Mr. Railton? My mother, Mrs. Masters."

Honora Masters had already arisen. Her hand clasped the back of a chair and held to it desperately, as if only that prevented her falling there at her daughter's feet; and Percy Railton, as he inclined his stately head, was as white as death. The colour had even faded from his lips, and his eyes burned with a passion that seemed about to break out in fierce denunciation. But he controlled himself and muttered the name that Eva had spoken, his eyes travelling over the head of his little *fancie* to where her mother stood, with that pleading look upon her still beautiful face, beautiful in spite of the wild fear that blanched it.

And poor little Eva, the innocent country lass, thought she understood the emotion of each—alas!

"Mamma came late this afternoon," she continued, trying to cover the awkwardness of each of them. "We didn't expect her until to-morrow, and it was such a lovely surprise. She is so busy now that we don't see her as often as we used to, nor one-tenth as often as we wish. You see, Mr. Railton," she continued, with a shy little laugh that contained a note of wistfulness, "mamma has been the man of the family since papa died. She won't let either grandma or I help her, but insists upon making all the living herself, living in a hot, stuffy, noisy city, and slaving for us that we may remain out here in God's beautiful country, as free as the birds around us. I don't think it is fair, do you? We should each bear our share of the burden."

During all the long speech Percy Railton had not once looked at her. His eyes were fixed upon that scorching face before him, crimson now with something that looked like shame. There was contempt, almost loathing, in his own expression, and he found it difficult to unfasten his gaze from that quivering mouth and transfer it to Mrs. Denman, Eva's grandmother, when she came upon the balcony.

He touched her hand almost as absently as he had pressed Eva's a few moments before, and responded vaguely to her inquiry concerning his health.

Dinner was announced shortly afterward, and Eva seized her grandmother's arm quickly.

"You will bring mamma, Mr. Railton, please," she exclaimed, endeavouring to speak gayly, but somehow feeling the cheerfulness frozen upon her lips.

And Percy Railton found himself forced to offer that woman his arm—that woman whom he felt it was criminality to touch!

Mrs. Masters lifted her eyes to his beseechingly.

There was not much that she could say. Those other two were close beside them, leading the way to the dining-room.

They could not delay their entrance there, but her shaking lips formed one sentence,—

"For her sake."

It contained more pleading than a thousand words could have formulated, and touched Railton in his most vulnerable point.

He inclined his head slowly, without a word, and they followed the others.

"Does mamma look as you expected to see her, Mr. Railton?" questioned Eva, lightly, forcing a conversation that flagged dreadfully.

As he loosened his tongue from the roof of his mouth, to answer with moreunction than the question called for,

"No; not at all."

"But you think she looks like me, don't you?"

And with a note of horror in his tone which he could no more have controlled than he could the pallor of his face, he returned,—

"Not in any particular."

Eva looked at him in surprise.

"I'm so disappointed," she said, wistfully. "I had rather look like her than any one in the world. I think my mother is very beautiful, Mr. Railton."

"Eva!"

There was a touch of heart-hungry, heart-broken reproof in the contrite voice, an expression of pleading pain in the curious brown eyes, but Eva laughed sweetly.

"It is no crime for a daughter to admire her mother, mamma, particularly such a one as mine."

And so the dinner progressed awkwardly enough, long silences broken by irrelevant questions and malapropos replies.

Once or twice Mrs. Masters tried to throw off the oppression that seemed to engulf her, but her vivacity was short-lived and she sank back again into the bitter silence that seemed to Eva almost stupid.

It was a relief to them all when the dinner came to an end, and they could go to the parlour for music.

It was a pretty, artistic room, not elegant in any sense, but furnished with an eye to comfort, that was soothing after the glare of fashionable life, and it had been refreshing to Percy Railton; but he glanced about it now as if it had grown hot and sultry, with the arid breath of the gas-lit halls of Bohemia.

Eva went to the piano without being asked, and played in her sweet, simple way—not a great musician, but with heart and soul in her touch—and Mrs. Denman, who was housekeeper of the small establishment in spite of her age, attended to the duties that were required of her.

It was then that Honora Masters found time to whisper to Percy,—

"I must see you to-night. Meet me under the old apple-tree at the end of the garden half-an-hour after you say good-night."

But he shrunk back as if she had struck him.

Down there, where he had told Eva only that afternoon of his great love for her, and had kissed her lips for the first time.

He could not go to that spot, where his love had seen its birth, to witness also its death.

"No, no!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Not there! Anywhere but there. Let it be at the bridge across the Mystic Gulf, if you will."

She shivered slightly as she nodded to him, and passed away again, where she would be out of the line of his vision.

The strains of music affected her pitifully. She went to the window nervously, and looked out.

The moonlight lay in great rifts upon the garden beyond, pale and cool and peaceful. Stars dotted the clear sky like golden nails.

A gentle breeze blew the sweet perfume of the flowers to her nostrils. She stood there looking out on the peaceful beauty with wild rebellion in her soul, her hands clasped over each other, her eyes hot and turbulent.

The white lips did not move, the rigid form remained upright and tentative. She seemed unconscious of the lapses of time, and was only recalled to herself by the voice of her daughter, saying gently,—

"Mamma, Mr. Railton wishes to say good-night to you."

She turned with a start, and bowed to him stiffly.

She could not bring herself to put out her hand to this lover of her daughter's, but she forced her numb lips to say, for Eva's sake,—

"Good-night, Mr. Railton. I think I am tired to-night from my journey. The next time we meet I hope I shall be more like myself."

He bowed with circumspect politeness.

"I have been inconsiderate to remain so long. I beg that you will pardon me."

"There is nothing to pardon," she said wistfully. "Good-night!"

Eva went with him to the door and out upon the balcony.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, eagerly. "You have not seen mamma to advantage. She has received a shock in a sudden recognition of the fact that I am no longer a child. You can't understand that, can you, Percy? But she is a very impressionable woman, and things sadden or gladden her more quickly than a less impulsive person. To-morrow you will see how lovely she can be. I hope you will like each other, Percy."

She looked up at him almost with pleading. It seemed to him that he would have given all his life to have taken her in his arms and kissed her sweet, tremulous lips, as he had done only that afternoon, but there had suddenly loomed up between them a barrier high as heaven itself.

He placed his hand upon her pretty, bright hair, touching it lingeringly, tenderly, barely repressing a sob that arose in his throat.

"Good-night, my darling!" he murmured, brokenly.

And then he left her.

Only that afternoon he had said to her,—

"Remember, nothing can take you from me now. Neither time nor death can come between us. You are mine, Eva."

Yet in less than one little day he had been robbed of her, robbed more surely than if death itself had come between them, he thought.

And when he had gone, she went back to her mother.

Honora Masters was watching the lithe, graceful figure as it swung slowly down the garden-path, watching it with an intensity that made her oblivious to all sound.

She was not aware of her daughter's approach until she felt two strong young arms about her.

"Mamma," the sweet voice whispered, "are you not pleased with him? Do you not think Percy handsome?"

And then the woman turned and caught the girl in her arms, straining her to her passionately throbbing heart.

"Yes, dear," she answered, her tears dropping uncontrollably upon the wondering, upturned face. "Handsome he is, but there are other things in life than that, my darling! And ah, Heaven! what a curse beauty is, after all! What a wild and bitter curse, only such victims of the world as I can ever know."

CHAPTER IV.

AGAINST the railing of the rustic bridge across Mystic Gulf Percy Railton leaned, his arms folded across his breast, his figure clear cut, yet drooping in the pale moonlight, that gave an even more romantic and uncanny aspect to the scene, than was usual.

A deep ravine lay between the two hills that were not less than mountains, although not dignified by that name, while from the back a cascade of leaping water sprung, beaten to a froth over the jets of rock that protruded beneath. It fell in a narrow, swift current at the bottom of the ravine, so plainly that the white rocks were plainly visible.

The undergrowth on either side was dense and tangled, and from it sprang flowers which no human hand touched, because they bore the reputation of being poison.

They were flaming in colour, brilliant in beauty, rich in a certain sort of wild perfume, and yet the residents round about feared them as they would a visitation from another world.

There were those who told stories of a lady in white who wandered after nightfall among them inhaling their deadly perfume and pressing them to her bosom, and there was a romantic story connected with the mystic lady of how she had been pushed from the bridge at nightfall, and had haunted the place ever since.

Certainly Percy Railton might have been taken for the hero of the story as he stood there, looking downward buried in bitter reflection, for there was neither hope nor happiness in his countenance.

He neither moved nor stirred, scarcely even seemed to breathe, but stood there with a long shadow reflected behind him, as ghastly in appearance as the white lady could ever have been.

Honora Masters paused, and shivered as she stepped upon the bridge; then she went forward hastily and touched him upon the arm.

She was icy cold, even under that balmy-air that was warm as a breath of summer.

"Come out of the moonlight, Percy," she said, slowly, her voice stiff and unnatural. "It casts such long shadows that seem like accusing fingers, and some one might pass along the road and—*and see!*"

He followed her mechanically to the other side of the bridge and stood there, screened from the moonlight by a great tree that bent its long limbs protectingly. He leaned there against the tree-trunk as if he lacked the strength to support himself unaided, while she, the weaker person, the person with the weight of the world in sorrow and despair upon her shoulders, stood before him erect and upright. He did not help her in the least, while not realizing his own cruelty, but stood there waiting for her to speak.

"Percy," she said at last, wringing her white fingers together helplessly, "how did you meet Eva? Somehow I feel that I am committing sin merely speaking her name, she who is my own child."

A long, low breath that was almost a groan left the man's white lips.

"You destroy my last hope," he said, brokenly. "I thought there might have been some mistake; that she might not be your daughter. How is it possible? How can a creature so pure as that be the child of——"

He paused, because she had drawn back as if he had struck her, and he did not mean to be deliberately cruel.

He put up her hand pitifully, and spoke in that despairing voice that never can be assumed.

"You cannot despise me more than I do myself, Percy," she said; "but, after all, how little of the real truth you know! Oh, my boy, why should you condemn me alone? And even if I have sinned, why should my error rest upon her innocent shoulders?"

"Good Heaven! You don't mean that you would have me marry her!"

He shrunk back, his face growing white and stern. She went nearer him, and looked pleadingly in his face.

"Why not?" she said, eagerly. "What has she done? Her sin is that she is the daughter of Honora Masters, known to the world only as Madame Honora."

"Yes, Madame Honora, the toy of——"

"For Heaven's sake, hush! Some day you will regret your words! Some day, when you know the truth, you will repent it in sack-cloth and ashes! You judge me by what the world knows, not from any personal knowledge. You——"

"For the love of Heaven, don't try to make me believe you innocent! Heaven knows I should be glad to believe any story to which you might give utterance, for her sake; but I have been a guest in your drawing-room; I have met the people who assemble there, people whom I was ashamed to recognize afterward in the street. I have known your secret for years—your secret and that of—my father! Good Heaven, woman! do you think I can forget that you are a constant insult to my dead mother. Do you think that any feeling of mine, were it stronger than life itself, could induce me to wed the daughter of my father's——"

"Don't speak that word! I tell you that you will grovel in the dust for having uttered it. I tell you that all the repentance of your future life could not wipe it out!"

She held up her hand warningly, with a stately dignity that brought a dash of hope to his eyes, but it vanished quickly as the tone changed to one of weary pleading.

"Oh, Percy," she cried, "what does it matter what I am? Would you hesitate to wear a flower because it was not plucked from the garden of life? I know that I have sinned; I know that

I have not the right to ask it; but surely there is some forgiveness for such as I. Why should she be made to suffer because of me? Will you go to her and say that you cannot make her your wife because her mother is a thing unfit to touch? Will you break the heart of that innocent girl because of me?"

The young man turned away with a groan.

"You may tell her what you like," he said, half sullenly. "Tell her that I am a scoundrel if you will, and have left her of my own accord; but surely—turning upon her fiercely—"you will never go back to the old life now! You will try to be a good woman for her sake! You will abandon the ways of the past, knowing the terrible suffering you have brought into two people's lives, for I know she loved me even as I love her."

The woman smiled; the agony upon her face was incalculable.

"How little you know of the possibilities of a woman's life," she said, almost calmly. "Listen for one moment, Percy."

"When Eva's father died I was left penniless. There was not even enough to provide for him a burying-place, and but for the charity of the city he would have found a resting-place in a hollow with hundreds of others."

"I was young—unfortunately, beautiful. Eva was barely ten years old—too young to fight her way in the world. Besides her, there was my mother, as despondent as if she, too, were a baby."

"Percy, do you know what it is to a mother to hear her child crying for bread which she cannot supply? It was worse than that with me, for Eva was a child who would have died before a murmur would have passed her lips."

"But I saw her wasting away. I saw the tender flesh falling from her body, and I knew it was because there was not left anything of sustaining power."

"The doctors told me that my child was dying of consumption, but I knew it was for want of food. I stood there helplessly and watched it."

"When I asked for work, people looked at me and smiled. One man said to me, 'Pretty one, you are not fit to work. You are only fit to be loved.' That was a sample of all."

"Without a penny, without help, with starving ones at home, what could I do? It was despair, Percy—despair and insanity."

"And while that mania was upon me, a man came into my life—call him the serpent, if you will—I called him a hating angel. He was your father! You must hear the story of what happened then from his lips, Percy. You never can from mine."

"That is all. Blame me if you will. Go and leave her. If I have sinned, Heaven knows the punishment is great enough. I would give my life to save her suffering. I am willing even now to leave her and never enter her life again, if you will not rob her of the happiness of your love. I——"

She had broken down, and was sobbing bitterly. The young man stood staring beyond her into the moonlight above her head. He was gnawing his lips as if some terrible temptation were upon him. After all, had he the right to constitute himself judge? What was he that he should condemn her, particularly with such temptation as that? And what was it she meant when she said that he would grovel in the dust at her feet for mentioning that word in connection with her?

He turned to her impulsively.

"Honora," he said, quickly, "I am going to my father. I am going to tell him the story of your little country lass. I am going to let him decide which is to be for me, eternal happiness or eternal misery. Is that fair? Is that right?"

There was hope in her countenance as she lifted it to his.

"Yes," she answered, hoarsely; "go to him."

"And what shall you say to Eva to account for my absence?"

She smiled up at him with something of her old *débonair* beauty.

"I shall tell her that you have gone to see your father, Percy—the truth, only the truth—and that you have gone at my request. I shall tell her that you will return, my boy!"

"You are so sure, then?"

"Yes; for I am going with you. My child's whole future happiness is bound up in this. I cannot see it fail. I shall go with you to London in the morning, and bring you back to her!"

Pitiful Heaven! why could it not have been as she imagined? Why is Satan's emissary always in the background of our lives?

CHAPTER V.

The smile upon Honora Masters' face was faint and evanescent when she descended to the tiny parlour the following morning; but there was infinitely more of hope in it than there had been the evening before. She had had her breakfast served in her own room, and wore her travelling gown and bonnet when she called Eva to her side.

The young girl looked at her in dismay.

"Surely you are not going away so soon?" she cried, her lips trembling piteously. "Oh, mamma, it is worse than not to have seen you at all!"

Honora Masters stretched out her arms and drew her daughter down beside her. There was almost adoration expressed in her beautiful face.

"Wait, my darling, until you have heard me," she said, tenderly. "Last night I could not sleep, weighted as I was with a knowledge for which I should have been prepared, but which came to me with cruel abruptness. It seemed to me that I should suffocate, up there in my room, and after a time, unable to bear it longer, I slipped out of the house and went wandering about alone in the night."

"With the true instinct of the restless lover, Percy Railton was sleepless also, and he, too, had gone forth to wander. We met. As might have been expected, your name was the first upon his lips, and he told me of his hope, that some day I would consent to his making you his wife. We spoke, too, of his father, Eva, do you know who Percy Railton's father is?"

"He is an artist, isn't he?"

"The most famous in England—one of the most famous of his own day in the world. Besides that, he comes of a family of proud and aristocratic origin, who have always mated with wealth and the best of blood. My dear, your father was a poor village doctor, whose father before him was a carpenter. Your mother is a—"

"Milliner!" cried Eva, supplying the word for her. "I see what it is you mean. You think I am not good enough! You—"

"Hush!" cried Mrs. Masters, with dignity. "You are good enough to mate with a king, for what is there to be compared with truth, and virtue and innocence! It is only that I fear that Gerald Railton may not recognize that fact. It is only that I fear his pride may stand in the way of your happiness, and my Eva would never enter a family in which she was not welcome."

There was no need for words in reply to her assertion. The look in those sweet blue eyes was quite enough.

Mrs. Masters continued,—

"I am going this morning to see Gerald Railton myself. Your lover will accompany me. I shall hear him put his request to make you his wife. I shall also hear the answer that is given. Are you satisfied, my darling?"

She took the sweet face between her hands and looked into the clear eyes almost pleadingly.

"You always do that which is wisest and best," answered Eva, kissing her upon the lips. "Heaven bless you, dearest."

"He cannot refuse," muttered Honora Masters to herself, feverishly, as she was driven to the train. "He shall not refuse. I will go upon my knees to him and plead for my child's happiness. Surely he will not deny me that! Surely he cannot!"

She spoke little to Percy on their way to London, and Heaven knows he felt little enough like conversation. He was pale, haggard, but too evidently distract, and she watched him with a feeling in her heart that struggled between hope and despair.

"If you will go to your rooms," he said to her when they reached the city, "I will see my father at once and come to you."

She looked up at him wistfully.

"There is but one request I have to make," she said, tremulously: "If he withdraws his consent to your marriage with my daughter, will you promise that I may see him before you accept his refusal as final?"

"Yes, I promise that!" he answered dully.

He put her in a hansom, gave the address to the driver, then sprung into another, and was driven to his father's home. He felt comparatively sure that he should find him, knowing the hours at which his father was usually at home, and was not disappointed.

Gerald Railton was, as Percy had described him to Eva, fat, fifty and bald; but he was not fat enough to be disagreeable to look at, by any means, nor was he bald enough for it to be noticeable to a chance acquaintance. His hair was tinged with a frost that was exceedingly becoming in contrast with his dark eyes. He weighed, perhaps, fifteen to sixteen stone, but with his six feet and an inch of height carried it well. He was a handsome man, appearing almost ten years younger than he really was, a man of the world to the tips of his fingers, and one whom every one liked, for his fame as an artist had not made him indifferent to the opinions of his fellow-men.

He shook Percy heartily by the hand as he entered the room, then scanned him with critical eyes.

"Where have you been?" he questioned, standing before the young man with both hands stuck a trifle in his pocket, balancing himself on heel and toe. "You look—hanged if I know what you look like, anything but yourself! What have you been doing? Not drinking, I hope?"

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Percy, forcing a laugh. "I hope you don't think I've descended to that vulgarity."

"You don't ever mean to tell me that you've been falling in love and got a slap in the face? I don't admire the taste of the woman who would refuse you."

"It isn't that, either," said Percy, quietly, turning a trifle away. "I have got a slap in the face, but not through the woman I love."

"Oh! Then it is love! I thought it would come sooner or later."

The elder man was smiling good-naturedly. He threw himself into a chair, cut the end from a cigar, deliberately lighted it, then elevating his foot to a comfortable angle, put his hands behind his head and exclaimed, carelessly,—

"Fire away now! I'm prepared to listen to any amount of idiotic eulogies of the fair one, but I confess I am more interested in the facer. Suppose you begin with that?"

"I can't," answered Percy, throwing himself into a chair opposite his father, and gnawing his moustache restlessly. "I must begin at the beginning; and, frankly, I'm afraid I've got a stammerer for you. I've been down in the country."

"You don't mean to tell me that she is a milkmaid?"

"Don't chaff! You won't when I've finished, anyway. She not only is not a milkmaid, but the daintiest, fairest little creature that even an artist could dream of. Her manner is that of a childlike princess. She is as sweet, as chic, as charming as any town-bred girl could be, and she adds to it the innocence and purity of a perfect country flower."

"I should laugh at you were I not certain of your unfailing taste. I shall paint her as Psyche."

"Good Heaven! don't ever speak of it! I had rather you should cut her throat before my very eyes."

The young man had sprung to his feet, and was rushing madly up and down the room. His father looked at him for a moment in surprise, then said, quietly,—

"One might think I had offered her some deadly insult."

"Wait until you hear. I fell in love with her—Heaven knows how madly! It seemed to me

that I could not exist out of her presence. I told her of that love, and the very sweet simplicity with which she received it but added to my passion. I worshipped her—I do worship her. I have come to you for your consent to make her my wife in spite of everything, for I tell you frankly now that without her my life is spoiled. I am not a young fool who imagines himself in love with Maude one day, and Phyllis the next, but to discover that his heart is irretrievably given to Beatrice on the third. You know that I have never loved before, and this passion means more than life to me."

The elder man looked at him with a half-cynical smile in his eye.

"Then why on earth don't you marry her and rid yourself of it?" he asked, calmly. "It must be intensely disagreeable to be carrying a feeling like that about with you; it's worse than indigestion."

"I have come to you for your permission!" exclaimed the young man, hotly.

"It's yours! My dear boy, it's yours, with all my heart! Do you suppose for one moment that I would subject you to such disease as that for the rest of your life, when I can cure you by a single word? Marry her, by all means."

"Don't laugh, father! For Heaven's sake, don't laugh! Do you think I would come to you in this fever of excitement, this anguish of soul, if there were not some horrible thing behind it all? Her mother is a woman who lives in the city, and goes to see her daughter but seldom. The child lives with her grandmother. Yesterday the mother came, and I met her."

"Oh, I see; some horrible, overdressed, vulgar creature, and—"

"No; well-dressed, refined, beautiful."

"Then—"

"Let me tell you the whole cursed truth in a word—her mother is Madame Honora!"

Gerald Railton sat there in silence. The smile had faded from his lips, and an expression difficult to fathom had settled in his dark eyes. He sat there staring at his son as if one of the two of them had suddenly lost his senses, and he could not quite determine which.

(To be continued.)

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DOLLY'S ADVENTURE.

—10.—

(Continued from page 584.)

"Why it's Dolly, my own little Dolly! Darling, how did you find me? I've been wanting you so, Dolly. As soon as my aunt died, and I could do as I liked, I wrote to you and dear Mrs. Hardy. I wanted you to come and live with me, but my letter came back to me. You had gone away, and no one quite knew where."

But Dolly did not answer. She was clinging to Marguerite, as though to implore her pity.

"You'll love me just the same," she pleaded. "You're so rich, and I'm only Dolly."

"I shall always love you, dear. Where's dear Mrs. Hardy? Why didn't she come too?"

"She's gone to Heaven," sobbed Dolly. "I'm all alone, but I mean to earn my own living. That's what I've come to London for; only I thought you'd let me stay with you a little first. London seemed so much bigger than I thought, and people stared at me so. I had seen your address long ago in a *Court Guide*, and it seemed to come suddenly into my head, and I thought I'd come to you."

Dolly's arms went round her. Daisy was whispering loving words of welcome.

"You shall be my dear little sister!"

Dolly shivered. Only yesterday someone else had made that very proposal to her, and how had she requited him! It seemed to Dolly she had treated her guardian very badly.

"I'd better tell you everything," she said, penitently. "Daisy, mamma died only one week ago, and I've done heaps of wrong things already."

For all answer, Daisy kissed her.

"We were very poor after you went," said Dolly, frankly. "At last we had to let rooms, just like common people, and a gentleman came and loved mother. He married her, and made her just as happy as he could, and then he died."

Poor Mrs. Hardy," said Marguerite, "that was very dreadful for her."

"We lived on in his old home," continued Dolly; "it was mother's for her life. When she knew she was dying she sent for her stepson, and asked him to see to me, but he had treated mother horribly, and I didn't want to be kept by him, so I ran away."

Marguerite put one arm round her.

"You shall be my dear little friend and companion, Dolly. I have such news for you!"

"Don't!" said Dolly, tragically, "if you mean you're going to get married. I hate people who do that."

"But you won't hate me, little one!"

"Perhaps not; who is it?"

"His name is Ronald Thorne; he is an officer, and the noblest man in the world!"

"You used to say you'd never marry anyone, and that you and I might always live together."

"We'll live together just the same. I know you'll love Ronald."

"I shall not!"

"Yes you will; he and I will take great care of you until—"

"Until what?"

"You find a Ronald of your own."

Mrs. Asherton shook her head with great dignity.

"I never shall. I don't approve of love."

"Wait till you've been tried!"

"I have been tried," majestically, "more than a year ago. Oh! Daisy, he was so horrible."

Mrs. Asherton joined the conference. The rich, childless widow was delighted with Dolly's pretty face, and welcomed her eagerly. She accepted Dolly's account that her little friend had lost her mother, and come in her loneliness to seek out her old playmate.

Lady Marguerite purposely left out all mention of the cruel stepson—she rather thought Dolly's story more attractive without him.

Then began halcyon days for the pretty

fugitive. Mrs. Asherton petted her, Daisy treated her as a dear young sister; and even Ronald Thorne, who was rather disposed to be jealous of her, relented at the first sight of her blue eyes.

True, she mourned for her mother; true the loyal childish heart could not forget that beautiful dead mother; but remembering those who have loved us is not all pain; and Dolly was far from unhappy in London. As the weeks wore on she grew a little curious as to how her guardian was taking her absence. She had never told Marguerite his name; the latter had no idea of all that name meant to Dolly, when she said one day carelessly to her friend,

"Where is Sir Ira? I never meet him anywhere. Surely he is not ill!"

"He's worse—he's worried."

"But I thought he was so rich."

"So he is! Money troubles are not the only ones, my darling."

"And he can't be in love!"

"I believe he is."

Miss Hardy deliberately got up and crossed the drawing-room on her way to her own chamber. Arrived there she sat down and cried as though her heart would break, she had not the least idea why—only she was miserable.

She remembered Sir Ira's handsome, earnest face, his deep musical voice, the tenderness of his smile, and (this last with a burning blush) the caress he had imprinted on her brow. Somehow Dolly did not like to think of anyone else having a right to his caresses.

Poor little Dolly! she had been used to be first all her life, and she was first with no one now. Daisy loved her, but she was nothing to Daisy when Ronald Thorne was by. A great longing came over her, that someone might love her as Mr. Thorne did Daisy. Somehow it occurred to Dolly she had made a mistake in leaving the Grange on that bright April morning—that Sir Ira's charity would have been no grievous yoke after all.

Marguerite came in search of her. Mr. Thorne had departed, and so his betrothed had leisure to remark the tear-stains on her little friend's pretty face.

"Is there anything the matter, dear?"

"Nothing!" said Dolly, meekly; "only I think I've got a headache."

A heartache would have been nearer the truth.

Some days after Sir Ira called, but Dolly did not see him. She heard after he looked pale and careworn.

"I think Ronald is right, and he must be in love," commenced Daisy when he had gone, "only I can't imagine anyone's refusing him. He is very proud and stately, but I think he would be all tenderness to a girl he loved."

Dolly had had some experience of his tenderness in a girl he did not love, but she did not relate it for Daisy's benefit.

The little fugitive had been provided by Daisy with everything suited to her deep mourning. She never went into society; she rarely appeared when there were visitors at home, but she often drove with Marguerite. She loved the open-air, and this was her greatest pleasure.

She was in the carriage alone one afternoon; it had conveyed Mrs. Asherton and Lady Marguerite to a garden party, and Dolly had accompanied them just for the drive. They were within a few yards of home when one of the horses took fright, and rushing frantically along broke the traces, and overturned the carriage.

For one instant Dolly felt a sharp, keen pain, then all was unconsciousness. She knew nothing more until she found herself on a sofa in Marguerite's bedroom with the heiress and Mrs. Asherton bending over her; while in the background hovered the maid, and a grave, elderly gentleman, whom she felt dimly was the doctor.

She opened her eyes.

"What is the matter?"

"You have been very ill," said Marguerite, gently. "Drink this, dear, and try to keep quiet!"

She drank the draught and sank back in a dreamless slumber. When she awoke it was broad daylight, and the maid was sitting by her.

"I feel so strange," said Dolly; "my head

aches, and I seem to be just getting well of a long illness!"

The maid smiled.

"It's just a mercy, Miss Hardy, you were not killed. Sir Ira Vernon saved you at the risk of his own life. They say it was one of the bravest things ever done!"

"Daisy," said the invalid later that day, when she was alone with her friend, "is it quite true?"

"Is what true?"

"That Sir Ira saved my life!"

"Quite. Oh, Dolly, why didn't you tell me Sir Ira was your mother's stepson?"

"I couldn't, somehow. Is he very angry?"

"Who? What about?"

"Sir Ira. With me for running away."

"He seems too happy to be angry with any one just now, Dolly. If Ronald is right, and he is really in love, I should say the lady had relented and promised to marry him."

"Ah!"

It was strange how, after that, Dolly never seemed very anxious to make haste and get well. She was a very obedient invalid—she did just what they told her, got up when they wished it, went to bed when it was recommended—only she made no effort to get well. It really seemed as if she did not much care if she died or not.

"You must rouse her," the doctor said to Marguerite and Mrs. Asherton. "This depression is not natural in one so young. She has a very delicate constitution; and if a change does not take place soon for the better I fear the shock she has received will throw her into a decline."

After that Daisy grew peremptory; she insisted that Dolly should be dressed, and laid on the sofa in the drawing-room every afternoon. Generally she sat there herself; but one day, three weeks after the accident, Ronald Thorne had come unexpectedly to take her for a drive, and at Dolly's own entreaty she deserted her post as nurse. Mrs. Asherton was engaged with company in her own sitting-room, so Dolly was alone.

About a quarter-of-an-hour after Marguerite's departure a tall, handsome man knocked at the door, and asked to see her. The porter recognised him at once as Sir Ira Vernon, and knowing him for the intimate friend of his young lady's betrothed, made no difficulty about admitting him, assuring him his mistress was in the drawing-room.

John was an admirable domestic, but he had been absent at dinner when Marguerite and her lover passed through the hall, so that he had not the slightest idea he was misleading the visitor.

"I know the way," said Ira. "I will go up alone."

And as he slipped half-a-sovereign into the porter's hand, the latter let him have his whim. Sir Ira had come resolved to confide in Lady Marguerite, and to tell her that Dolly was no longer to him the little wistful child who had refused his kindness, but the one woman in the world he wanted for his wife.

His joy at recognising her in the Asherton carriage, his agony at perceiving her danger, had taught him his own secret if those despairing weeks, in which he sought her so vainly, had not done it already. At first he had been full of delight at finding her he had had no room for sorrow; but as day after day passed, and was always refused a sight of her—the refusal arising solely from her delicate state, could he only have known it—he determined to confide in her friend.

He opened the drawing-room door and went in. Oh, how it reminded him of that Sunday at the Grange, barely three months before! One glance and he knew that Lady Marguerite was absent; the little figure on the large couch was his darling.

He went up to her and took her hand; the white, wan face quite upset all his plans of a grave, brotherly greeting. Before he knew what he was about he was kneeling by the side of the sofa.

"Dolly, Dolly, what has changed you so?"

"I've been ill," said Dolly, feebly. "Do you mean I'm so bad they've sent for you to say goodbye to me?"

"Poor Ira! he felt a strange pain at his heart.

"My dear child, how can you think so!"

"I don't think I should be sorry," she said, slowly. "Daisy is very, very kind, you know; but she's got Mr. Thorne. She doesn't really want me."

"You jealous little thing!"

He was stroking her golden hair, much as though she had really been the little child he once expected to find her.

"Were you sorry," she asked, "when you found I was gone, or did you think it a happy release?"

"I have been seeking you ever since; it was the greatest relief I ever felt when I saw you in Mrs. Asherton's carriage."

"Then you recognised me?"

"Was I likely to forget you?"

"You needn't say that. I know I treated you very ungratefully; but you needn't tell me you hate me so you couldn't forget me."

"I did not mean that."

"Well, I have had my own way," with a strange, heavy little sigh; "but I have often thought I ought to have written and told you I was well and cared for. Since I've been ill I've fancied, somehow, I'd like to hear you say you forgive me."

"There's nothing to forgive, child"—but, oh! how hoarse his voice was. "It was natural you should prefer living with Lady Marquita."

"And you are going back to the Grange soon—the dear old Grange!"

"I shall never go back to it."

"But you will take your wife there—you must. Lady Vernon couldn't live anywhere but the Grange."

"There will never be a Lady Vernon while I live. I think I share your distaste for matrimony, Dolly. Have you got it still?"

There was a dimness about her blue eyes.

"It makes some people happy. Look at Daisy—how she loves Ronald, and he her!"

"But you never mean to love anyone!"

"No."

"Nor I, though you have taken it so firmly into your head there is to be a Lady Vernon, I shall never bring one to introduce to you."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly."

"Do you know I think I'm glad?" said Dolly, wistfully. "Somehow I couldn't bear to think of any one else at the Grange."

A strange impulse moved him.

"Shall I give the Grange to you, Dolly?"

She shook her head.

"It is your home."

"But it might be yours too. I meant it to be; when I came down there last April I never had any other thought than to make a home there for my little adopted sister."

"I think I'd rather not. You see," said the girl, half sadly, "you might change."

"I am not given to change."

"Ah! but you might some day—you might bring home a wife, and if she did not like me I should lose my home again!"

"Or you might take a husband?"

"I shall never do that—never!"

"Are you thinking of Mr. Ball? All men are not like that insufferable cod."

"I wish I had been your sister, really," said Dolly, with a tear in her blue eyes.

"I am very glad you are not."

"I could have stayed with you always then," she went on slowly; "and if you married ever so your wife couldn't have sent me away. Besides, however horrid or nasty I was, you'd have had to put up with me then!"

"Dolly, I ask nothing better, sweet, than to put up with you all my days. Dolly, my little wandering child, give up your independent roving, and let me take you home."

The girl hesitated.

"For always?" she asked him. "Don't you think you'd get tired?"

"Don't you understand?" he said, gravely. "I am asking you to swear to love me while your

life lasts—I am begging you to accept my love and devotion until my life's end."

Dolly shuddered.

"It sounds so solemn—just like the marriage service."

"That is it. Don't you understand, little one? There is only one way now in which I could take you to the Grange—only one relationship you can fill to me—that of a dear wife!"

Dolly drew away her hands.

"It is just as though I had asked you to marry me."

"I should be very much obliged to you if you had, then I should feel sure of my happiness."

"Would it make you happy, really?"

"So happy that I would forgive you all the sleepless nights and anxious days you have cost me. Dolly, I cannot bear trifling. I am almost thirty, and you are my first love. If it is all in vain say so, and I will never see your face again."

For all answer she took his hand and pressed it to her lips.

"I couldn't spare you!" she said, wistfully.

"Somehow, I think I have wanted you all these months."

"And I you. Then it is settled—my little ward is to be Lady Vernon."

His arms were round her, and Dolly gave herself up to the sweetness of that embrace only when Ira would have pressed lover's kisses on her lips, and now she turned away her face.

"It is my right," he whispered. "Don't you know you have given yourself to me?"

"I haven't!" retorted Dolly. "I only said you were not to go away."

"I can't stay if I am not to have my rights," then the face was no longer averted. "I had not so much difficulty last time I held you in my arms."

"You never—"

"I did—I brought you home the day of the accident—I carried you strained to my heart as its dearest treasure; I kissed you again and again, though I had little hope then you would ever live to return my caresses."

"I think it was very mean of you, when I couldn't help myself."

"I think it was very generous," retorted Sir Ira. "I gave you what I feared you would never consent to repay."

A long, long silence, broken at last by Dolly.

"You won't tell anyone, will you?" the last in a very coaxing tone.

"I shall, every one," returned Sir Ira, triumphantly; "I couldn't keep my happiness to myself. Besides, I shall want a great many witnesses against you in case you take it into your head to run away again."

But she never did; and barely three weeks after there was a quiet wedding in a fashionable London church, and the same evening Mrs. Hill welcomed home to the Grange her master and his bride—the girl who had once refused to be Vernon's Ward.

[THE END.]

FACETIA.

MISS OLDUN (playfully): "I'm older than you think I am." Miss Caustique: "I doubt it."

A WOMAN'S idea of recklessness is crossing a field in which a cow is feeding.

A WOMAN, by the name of Charity, struck her husband over the head with a boot, and came near killing him. Charity begins at home.

DESCRIBING IT EFFECTIVELY.—An Irishman, speaking of a relative who was hanged, said that he died during a tight-rope performance.

A HOUSEKEEPER asks, "What is the simplest way to keep jelly from moulding on top?" Shut a boy up in the pantry for a few minutes.

Mrs. MINKS: "So you now live on Blank-street. Is that locality respectable?" Mrs. Winks (with asperity): "I live there." Mrs. Minks (much hurt): "Well, I think you might give a civil answer to a civil question."

THE GROOM (very wealthy): "Why did you marry an ordinary chap like me?" The Bride: "I haven't the slightest idea: mamma managed the whole affair."

YOUNG WIFE (proudly): "George always says there's no cooking like mine." Uncle Crusty (with a disdainful sniff): "Does he? Well, he's about right there, poor chap."

MISS BULLION: "Papa says we can't be married until you are able to support me." Adorer: "Great Scott! Does he want his only daughter to die an old maid?"

RAGSON TATTERS: "Talk about hard luck, if I didn't git it proper!" Rollingstone Nomos: "What was dat?" Ragson Tatters: "Why, I swiped a diamon' necklace, an' after all me trouble I foun' it belonged to a actress."

MAGISTRATE: "How do you account for the fact that the man's watch was found in your pocket?" Prisoner: "Your worship, life is made up of inexplicable mysteries, and I hope your worship will so instruct the jury."

MR. HARDHEAD: "I have called, sir, to ask for the hand of your daughter." Old Gentleman (with emotion): "She is the only child I have, and her mother is gone." Mr. Hardhead (hastily): "Oh, that's no objection, I assure you."

OLD GENTLEMAN (putting a few questions): "Now, boys,—ah,—can you tell me what commandment Adam broke when he took the forbidden fruit?" Small Scholar (like a shot): "Please, sir, th' warn't no commandments then, sir!"

MR. TROTTER: "Why did you place Foster and Bell opposite each other at dinner? Don't you know they are bitter enemies?" Mrs. Trotter: "That's just it. I did it on purpose. They spent so much time in glaring at each other that they couldn't eat much."

"THEN, if I understand you," said a merchant to a customer, "you do not intend to pay the amount you owe me!" "Your understanding is correct, cap'n." "And you call yourself an honest man, do you?" "Yes, sir; if I were not honest, I would tell you that I intended to pay; but being honest, I do not wish to deceive you."

DRAGON DR GOOD: "It won't do; it won't do. We must not have games of chance at our church fairs." Mrs. Dr. Good: "But this is not a game of chance." "You propose to sell tickets and give prizes." "Oh, no; you are mistaken. We shall sell the tickets, of course; but we can't give any prizes, you know, because we haven't any to give. There is no chance about it."

Mrs. S.: "By the way, I hear Jupiter, the evening star, is worth seeing just now. Can either of you girls tell me where to look for it?" Bertha: "Yes, I can. It's exactly two yards and a half to the right of the Great Bear!" "Two yards and a half! What on earth do you mean?" "Well, I've measured it carefully with my umbrella!"

"How much will you take for that infernal accortion?" demanded the red-faced citizen who had thrust his head out of the second-story window. "It wouldn't do you any good to buy it, mister," answered the dejected musician on the pavement; "I've got six more of 'em at home." And he went on playing—"Home, Sweet Home."

A SMALL provincial paper referring to a man who had a reputation for a careless toilet, announced as follows:—"Mr. Makeup will wash himself before he assumes the office of parish clerk." On reading this, Makeup was furious, and he demanded a retraction, which the paper made thus:—"Mr. Makeup requests us to deny that he will wash himself before he assumes the office of parish clerk."

AN eccentric commercial traveller, well known on the road, lately astonished the ostler at a country inn by addressing him as follows: "My lad, extricate my quadruped from the vehicle, stabulate him, donate him a sufficient supply of nutritious aliment, and when the aurora of morn shall again illuminate the oriental horizon I will award you a pecuniary compensation for your amiable hospitality."

SOCIETY.

THE Prince of Wales has decided upon not going to Russia for the coronation of his nephew and niece.

THE Amber of Afghanistan's presents to the Queen have been valued at Bombay at thirteen lakhs of rupees, or £180,000.

THE Queen will return to Windsor from the Continent about April 28th, if Her Majesty goes on from Coburg to Coburg, as will probably be the case. If, however, the Queen abandons her visit to Germany she will get back to Windsor about April 17th.

THE Empress Frederick will return to Germany about the middle of April, in time to attend the Royal wedding at Coburg, after which she is going to Friedrichshof, her place on the Taunus Hills. Princess Beatrice will probably join the Empress at Friedrichshof about the end of April for a month or so.

PRINCE ALEXANDER OF BATTENBERG is to be sent after the Easter holidays to Mr. Rawlinson's school at Park Hill, near Lyndhurst, where his cousin, the young Duke of Albany, has been a pupil for some time past.

KING OSCAR OF SWEDEN will come to England for a short time at the beginning of July, in order to attend the wedding of his grand-nephew, Prince Charles of Denmark, and Princess Maud of Wales, and will be the guest of the Queen at Buckingham Palace and at Windsor Castle.

A PORTION of the Russian Crown jewels will shortly be removed to Moscow for the coronation. The most important is the magnificent crown, which was manufactured by a Geneva jeweller at the command of the Empress Catherine II. Immediately after her accession to the throne. It somewhat resembles a mitre, surmounted by a cross of five flawless diamonds, and the celebrated pear-shaped ruby, which has scarcely a superior in the world. This forms the only touch of colour, the rest of the stones being diamonds and pearls. The setting is of silver, and there is a band of purple velvet inside. The value of the crown is over 1,100,000 roubles, but that of the sceptre surpasses it. Made for the coronation of the Emperor Paul in 1797, it is the most wonderful thing of its kind which has ever been known, for the famous Orloff diamond surrounds it. The orb also dates from the reign of the Tsar Paul, and is of solid gold set with three rows of brilliants and a huge almond-shaped diamond. The diamond cross is supported by an exquisite sapphire worth a fortune. The Tsar will also don the collar, star and jewel of the Order of St. Andrew, valued at over one hundred thousand roubles. This Order is never worn save on a day of coronation, and is adorned with five pink diamonds and two Siberian aquamarines, one blue and the other green, set in diamonds. The jewels which the Tsarina will wear are little inferior in value. The State coronet contains stones of unequalled beauty. The necklace worn with it consists of huge single stones, with hanging pendants of still larger diamonds. The Coronation robe is to be the most costly ever beheld, and the masses of precious stones which her Imperial Majesty will wear in addition will be of incredible value. They include the smaller insignia of the St. Andrew Order set with gems representing a fortune. The Empress will also make a point of wearing during the various Coronation festivities the many exquisite gifts of jewellery with which the Tsar has presented her since her marriage.

IT is now thought that the marriage of Princess Maud of Wales to her cousin, Prince Carl of Denmark, will not take place until nearly the end of July. The Queen wishes to have it celebrated in the Chapel Royal, St. James's, where the two other children of the Prince of Wales have been married. In all probability later in the year Prince Carl and his bride will visit Scotland, Princess Maud being anxious that he should make acquaintance with scenes very dear to her. In this case the young Royal couple will be the guests of the Duke and Duchess of Fife.

STATISTICS.

THE minute hand of Big Ben is 16 ft. long.

Over hundred new words are annually added to the English language.

THE Library of the British Museum increases at the rate of about a hundred volumes a day.

THE longest paved street in the world is Washington-street, Boston, which is 17½ miles long. The shortest is the Rue Blé, Paris, which is barely 20 ft. long.

AN astronomer calculates that, if the diameter of the sun is daily diminished by 2 ft., over 3,000 years must elapse ere the astronomical instruments now in use could detect the diminution.

GEMS.

THE first object in all effort must be excellent. If that be absent the attempt to rise above others is mean and dishonourable.

GOOD humour is the very air of a good mind; the sign of a large and generous soul, and the peculiar soil in which virtue prospers.

NO good or lovely thing exists in the world without its corresponding darkness. The universe presents itself to mankind under the stern aspect of a warning or of choice, the good and the evil set on the right hand and on the left.

THE man who lives rightly and is right has more power in his silence than another who lives differently has by his words. Character is like bells which ring out sweet music, and which, when touched accidentally, even, resound with sweet music.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

JOHNNYCAKE.—One cup sour milk, one-half cup molasses, one egg, one teaspoonful soda, a little salt, one-third cup melted lard, one cup Indian meal, two cups sifted flour. Beat egg very light, and dissolve soda in a little hot water. Beat all together, and bake in a good oven, not too hot.

TUMBLER CAKE.—Four eggs, two tumblers sugar, one-half tumbler milk, one of butter, one-half tumbler molasses, three tumblers sifted flour one pound stewed raisins, one teaspoonful each of soda, cinnamon and nutmeg, two of allspice. Also makes a very nice steamed pudding, by using one-half the quantity of ingredients.

CRAB TOAST.—Put a spoonful of butter in a saucepan, and when hot add a small cupful of finely-chopped canned crab. Add half a tea-spoonful of flour and one-fourth of a cupful of cream, with salt and cayenne to taste. Simmer until the moisture is almost evaporated, and place between thin slices of buttered toast. A few drops of lemon juice is an improvement.

INDIAN SANDWICHES.—Take thin slices of bread cut in rounds with a sharp biscuit-cutter, and fry to a golden brown in a little butter. Mix half a cupful of minced ham with an equal quantity of chicken or tongue, season with curry powder, and add enough thick white sauce to make it of the consistency of pasta. Heat this filling in a saucepan, spread it between the rounds of bread, and serve hot on a folded napkin or cut paper.

BROILED LIVE LOBSTER.—Purchase a large live lobster. Split it down the centre of the back, following the natural line. Throw a towel over it and leave it for about ten minutes. Then remove the stomach and intestines. Place it on a broiler. Baste with melted butter over a coal fire, and broil slowly, shell side down, for at least twenty minutes. Turn, and broil the flesh side ten minutes. Turn again, baste with butter, dust with salt and pepper. Serve at once with a small dish of melted butter.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A TAX on bicycles has been proposed in Savannah.

A BAMBOO church organ is reported to have been built at Shanghai, and it is said to surpass organs made of metal.

STUDENTS in Constantinople are forbidden to frequent theatres, music-halls, and similar public places.

THE wood of the lime-tree is used for the sounding-boards of pianofortes, as it does not warp under change of temperature or atmosphere.

A CAB shaped like a bath tub, in which the passengers either sit or recline as if in bed, is in use in Berlin. It has three wheels, and is propelled by a naphtha motor.

ON the State railways in Germany the carriages are painted according to the colours of the tickets of their respective classes. First-class carriages are painted yellow, second-class green, and third-class white.

IN some of the cantons of Switzerland all the dead, rich and poor alike, are buried at the expense of the public. Government undertakers furnish everything gratuitously—the coffin, the vehicles, the grave, &c.

THE so-called "father of cats" is one of the most important personages in a Mahometan caravan. This cat-sheik carries on his camel about a dozen baskets filled with the ugliest specimens of the feline race.

ONE objection to the use of slate for roofing has been the impossibility of removing it without breaking after once it was laid. This trouble is done away with by a new idea. The opening in the slate is cut in the form of a keyhole, the larger part below. The nail is driven in and the slate is hooked on by passing the nailhead through the larger part of the opening, the slate then slides down so that the narrow portion rests on the nail. It is said to be impossible to dislodge the slate by any ordinary storm of wind, and the work of removal is naturally easy and without danger of breakage.

THERE are a number of our best known and most valuable cultivated plants which are already extinct in a wild state, or are fast becoming so. Of plants of this class the following may be mentioned: Bean, chickpea, lentil, tobacco, wheat, Indian corn and probably sweet potato. Some of these never have been seen in a wild state, while others have become so exceedingly rare that apparently it is only a question of a comparatively short time when they will have disappeared absolutely. They have been so long in cultivation, and are so profoundly modified, that they have not the faculty of sowing themselves and propagating indefinitely outside of cultivated ground, so that if they should cease to be cultivated they would soon disappear from the face of the earth.

MEDICINE and surgery are likely to be completely revolutionized by the new discoveries in photography. By means of this discovery the bones, muscles and internal organs of the body can be photographed with the utmost clearness. In one case the photograph showed the skeleton of a living man, in another a bullet was located, the case having puzzled surgeons for a long time. The light by means of which these photographs are taken is said to be made up of heat rays. It not only penetrates flesh and tissue, but wood and metal. The field opened by this discovery is practically limitless. Obscure diseases are accurately delineated before the eyes of the medical man. All of the processes of life are laid open before the scientist, the chemical changes of food can be studied, and maladies which have hitherto baffled the skill of the best doctors can be investigated at pleasure. Within the last two years the statement was made that the last decade of this century would witness discoveries before which all others would fade into insignificance. Surely this new idea in photography amply fulfils the prediction, even though progress stopped here for the next ten years.

April 4, 1896.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ARTHUR.—Your writing is good.**HARRY.**—Send them to the furrier.**J. B.**—Inquire at Inland Revenue Office.**T. A.**—He had better apply to the War Office.**OVERLAW.**—Such questions are never answered.**MADGE.**—The jewels in the Tower are all genuine.**T. A.**—The Greeks represented Persuasion as crowned.**AN OLD READER.**—The best form is in tablets or oranges.**HUNTER.**—He cannot interfere with either her or the business.**CISSUM.**—All dyes are injurious to the hair if used for any length of time.**LOCATOR.**—The best course would be to inspect a copy at Somerset House.**W. A. B.**—We should advise tinned soups which are hermetically sealed.**MARION.**—Do not strain your voice, and be very careful of catching cold.**BRYAN.**—Either by advertising or by personal inquiry in all likely quarters.**BOTANIST.**—The value is exactly what it would fetch; there is no fixed price.**P. J.**—The letters D. V. are the abbreviation for the Latin of "God willing."**TON.**—Dumb-bells used twice or thrice a day is the best remedy for round shoulders.**M. H. W.**—Psychological means that having union to the doctrine of the soul or mind.**G. T.**—It may be consequent on malformation of the throat or other structural defect.**A. MATRON.**—The address you require is 44, Westminster Bridge-road, London, S.E.**ARCHER.**—From Sydney to this country letters come in a month; there are weekly mails.**ALOU.**—Shave yourself often, and perhaps a moustache may be induced to make its appearance.**FARO.**—Smoking, when indulged in to excess, is exceedingly injurious to the constitution.**CONSTANCE.**—To get dirt or cinders out of the eye place a grain or two of saffron in the outer corner of it.**R. G.**—A little gin is sometimes used to get rid of such stains, or a little ammonia in the water.**HONORABLE.**—Write to the Agent-General for the Cape, Victoria-street, Westminster, S.W., if you like.**HUBERT.**—You can only get a fresh copy by obtaining access to the original document wherever it may be.**HENN.**—The hostess should not leave the drawing-room. A servant should be in attendance in the hall.**S. P. E.**—The laws for the whole of the three kingdoms are made in the Parliament meeting in London.**SYLVIA.**—There is no reason why you should not practice the daily singing of scales in private in order to train yourself.**PHOTOGRAPHER.**—The book desired can be obtained, we think, at any large city bookshop. Your newsagent can order it for you.**EDWIN.**—If constant daily shaving does not bring out your moustache and beard no pomade will assist the process.**THOUGHT ONE.**—Seek the advice of a physician of established reputation without delay, and he may be able to effect a permanent cure.**A. E. U.**—Better to cause a reply to be written for publication in some paper contradicting the objectionable statements.**BEVEREY.**—If the sum is over £2 send it by order, obtainable at any bank; if the amount is less, send by post-office order.**KRUYER.**—What is now used is taken from spinach—parsley principally; it is generally of French manufacture.**MYRA.**—There are powders and pastes and mixtures, but they amount to but little while ordinary food is left around.**A. LONDON READER.**—Bathing the feet every night in Gondy's Fluid will soon remedy what you complain of. Full directions are given with each bottle.**H. E. F.**—The claim to the property must be satisfactorily established before he would run the risk of a first outlay.**G. D.**—Only farmers, shepherds, and blind men can have unlicensed dogs; dairymen, cattle salesmen and graziers must all pay.**RICHARD.**—You do not say whether it is new wood or to repoint what has been already done and merely wants renovation.**D. E. W.**—Pack when well aired in a dry place with plenty of powdered camphor and ground white pepper, and carefully made up in brown paper.**J. K.**—A watch on exhibition in France has no hands or face, but when you press a button a tiny photograph speaks the time.**HEAVY.**—Much depends upon the hours at which you are accustomed to retire; but from ten at night until five in the morning is a good and proper time for sleep.**SOURFACE.**—It can often be cured by bathing night and morning with salt and water hot as can be borne. After bathing, rub the feet briskly with a coarse towel.**HOAXED.**—We are afraid the seller would say he did not promise to give you more than your money's worth, and the sum he charges does not pay for best silk.**YOUNG AUTHOR.**—Typewritten manuscript is greatly preferred by some publishers, but first-class work is not likely to be thrown aside because it is written with a pen.**W. R.**—The terms 12 A.M. and 12 P.M. are really more convenient; 12 o'clock noon is not, not at all; but to distinguish 12 noon from 12 midnight A.M. and P.M. are introduced.**G. W.**—We know nothing against the people you mention; but if you want a straightforward answer we should say you had better not have anything to do with any such firms as these.

THE DIAMOND QUEEN.

WINTER.—growing old and feeble,
Finding that his end was nigh,
Called to him his youngest daughter,
Saying, "I am soon to die."**TAKE MY DIAMONDS.**—February,
Softly, lost the South Wind bears,**AND BEWARE OF LOVE AND LOVERS.**—Or the gems will turn to tears."**WITH A THOUSAND STARRY JEWELS.**—
On her robe of silver sheer,
And her feet in snowy slippers,
Lo! she stood a diamond queen.
And the South Wind stole upon her,
But she heard his sly advance,
And she fled; the world would weep
With a single icy glance.**THUS SHE REIGNED IN ALL HER SPLENDOUR.**—
Till she heard afar at morn
O'er the snow, the mellow music
Of a hunter's distant horn.
Shouting through the frosty thickets,
With a trace of the larch,
In the cap he donned before her—
It was mad and merry March.**Something in His Breezy Bearing,**
Or his eye of stormy gray,
Thrilled her heart and held it captive—
But he loved and rode away.
For his frolic youth was blighted—
Madden April he would wed,
And the diamond queen deserted,
To her glittering palace fled.**BUT ITS TOWERS OF ICE WERE CRUMBLING**
In the glory of the sun,
And the fairy jewels melted
On her bosom one by one.
Forth she sped, with grief demented,
Over windy wood and wold,
Shrieking wildly for the lover
Who was false as he was bold.**HEAR HER WALLING UP THE VALLEY,**
Singing loudly at the door!
In a dawn of rose and opal,
She will pass for evermore.
Where the crystal peaks and turrets
Of her palace flushed in pride,
March will plant the violets purple
For the coming of his bride.**MARIE.**—The best way to clean dishes which have become burned and black is to boil a little vinegar and salt in them, when they may be easily scrubbed clean with any good kitchen scouring soap.**EMMA.**—You must first clean them with vinegar and water, then get below the scratches by rubbing down with finest glass paper, and repolish. If they areogany you will not want any stain.**AMBITIOUS.**—No one is able to tell whether or not a writer will be successful. There is no way but to try. A literary career is full of hard work and disappointments, but if one succeeds there are great compensations.**RACHEL.**—Put one teaspoonful of cocoa into a large cup with sugar to sweeten. Molester it with a little boiling water, and rub it smooth. Then have milk or milk and water boiling; pour it in, stirring all the time, and the cocoa will be ready. Boiling milk improves the flavour.**DESPONDENT.**—We are all apt at times to think ourselves worse off than we really are, and to give way to sad reflections; but be this your case or not, do let apathy get the better of you. Resolve to rise above every depressing influence and hope for better circumstances to surround you.**HOMESICK.**—Gather the celery on a fine dry day before it is injured by frost; cut off the leaves and roots, and lay it in a dry airy place till it is perfectly dry; then remove it to a cool cellar, where it will be quite secure from frost, and pack it up with sand, putting layers of celery and sand alternately.**KATHIE.**—The use of hot water and cold cream is not likely to cause the face to become disfigured with hair. Still it may do so; or if there is a natural tendency that way it may be increased by such means. Keeping the skin perfectly clean is one of the best things that can possibly be done. Then rub into it some delicate preparation, like rose-water and glycerine.**E. H.**—To one bottle of ordinary claret poured into a jug add one or two bottles of soda water, the peel of a lemon (cut very thin), powdered sugar according to taste. Some persons add a wine-glassful of sherry, but it is often used without. It should be mixed an hour or two before serving, but the soda water should be added at the last moment.**MARLA.**—Beat it well to get out all dust, scrub with scrubbing brush and plenty of soap and warm water, and rinse by throwing pails of water over it. We have seen it done in this way over two empty barrels on their sides in a back yard, and it turned out like new. The grease stains may be treated with benzine or with fuller's earth before the general cleansing takes place.**M. G.**—Pickles should be kept in either glass or stone jars and closely covered to exclude the air, otherwise they will soon become soft, instead of firm and crisp. One tablespoonful of sugar to each quart of vinegar is generally recommended. In putting the pickles over the fire which should be slow, let the water get hot, but do not allow them to simmer, as that tends to soften them.**ALFRED.**—No one can say with any degree of certainty when one or other of the seasons will begin and end; they vary with the years, and the only indication of their coming and going is the state of vegetation, but the point is decided upon astronomical considerations; thus the spring solstice is at March 16th, the summer solstice at June 21st, the autumn solstice at September 23rd, and the winter one at December 21st.**NORAH.**—If you wish to have tea as the Chinese make it let it never touch metal. It should be kept in paper, and when you use it, put a small quantity in a porcelain cup, fill the latter with boiling water, cover it with a porcelain saucer, and let it stand three minutes. Then, if you are very nice in your taste, drink only the upper layer of the golden liquid, throw the rest away, rinse the cup, and begin again. Never use sugar. Do not use milk.**ANNA.**—The old enamel should be rubbed down smooth with the finest glass paper, then dusted with a dry cloth. The fresh enamel should be laid on very thinly in a warm room, where it should stand to dry. Special warm rooms are arranged for this purpose by manufacturers. It should not, however, be done before the fire; it requires an even temperature. The thin coat is essential to success. If it requires the application of two thin coats let the first be thoroughly dry before the second is applied.**THE LONDON READER.**—Post-free. Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly, One Shilling and Eightpence.**ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS AND VOLUMES** are in print, and may be had of all Booksellers.**NOTICE.**—Part 417, Now Ready, price Sixpence, post-free, Eightpence. Also Vol. LXV., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.**THE INDEX to VOL. LXIV. is Now Ready; Price One Penny, post-free, Three-halfpence.****NOT ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER,** 384, Strand, W.C.**WE CANNOT UNDERTAKE TO RETURN REJECTED MANUSCRIPTS.****London:** Published for the Proprietor, at 384, Strand by G. F. Croomrook; and printed by Woodfall and co., 73 to 74, Long Acre, W.C.